

Wilhelm Tell

by

FRIEDRICH SCHILLER

Translated from the German
for the English-speaking stage

by

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MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY PRESS

BARNES & NOBLE INC., NEW YORK

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MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY PRESS
316-324 Oxford Road
MANCHESTER
M13 9NR
ISBN 0 7190 0426 8

U.S.A.
BARNES & NOBLE INC.
105 Fifth Avenue
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10003
USA SBN 389 04022 3

First published, 1970
Reprinted, 1973

Printed in Great Britain by
Butler & Tanner Ltd, Frome and London

Contents

PREFACE	<i>page</i> vii
INTRODUCTION:	
Historical background	ix
The language of the play	xi
The character of Tell and the 'Parricida Scene'	xvii
PERSONS OF THE PLAY	I
ACT ONE:	
Scene I	5
Scene II	12
Scene III	17
Scene IV	22
ACT TWO:	
Scene I	31
Scene II	36
ACT THREE:	
Scene I	53
Scene II	57
Scene III	61
ACT FOUR:	
Scene I	76
Scene II	82
Scene III	91
ACT FIVE:	
Scene I	102
Scene II	110

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Preface

In making this translation I have found the edition of Schiller's text published by Macmillan & Co. in 1968 (St. Martin's Press, New York) particularly useful and gladly acknowledge my debt to its editor, Professor William F. Mainland.

I also wish to thank Professor Ronald Peacock for reading the book at proof stage and the many colleagues at Manchester who have discussed specific points in the text with me. I am also especially grateful to Mr. Colin Charlton for his many valuable suggestions towards improving the English text and for his help in reading proofs.

J.E.P.

Manchester 1970

Introduction

Historical background

The three German-speaking cantons of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden (*Urkantone*, or original cantons, as they are called in Switzerland today) had been part of the so-called 'Holy Roman' Empire since the ninth century. Canton Schwyz eventually gave its name to the whole country and in Swiss-dialect, where the German word for Switzerland *Schweiz* is pronounced *Schwiiz*, the title of canton and country are still identical.

The Holy Roman Empire was composed in general of the German-speaking states of Central Europe and its Emperor was chosen by election. It was first termed 'Holy' by the Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa (1152-90) in allusion to its supposedly Divine origin; the adjective 'Roman' refers to the claim that the rulers in question had inherited the authority of the old Roman Emperors. Barbarossa's grandson, the Emperor Friedrich II, granted charters to the Swiss in 1231 and 1241, their purpose being to ensure the three cantons' protection by the Empire as a whole, in return for their giving the Emperor military aid when he needed it.

In 1273 Rudolf of Hapsburg, King of Austria, was elected Holy Roman Emperor and the Swiss were, therefore, in the position of having the ruler of their powerful neighbour Austria as head of the Empire. In Rudolf's own time this arrangement worked satisfactorily and Schiller's play makes it clear that Rudolf's memory was revered by the Swiss. He had renewed their charters, given them the protection they needed, and allowed them to govern their own affairs at home. When, however, Albrecht of Hapsburg was chosen Emperor in 1298, a different state of affairs came into being. Albrecht sought to make the three cantons vassal states of Austria and deprive them of their internal independence. Hence the distinction made in the play by people like Gertrud Stauffacher and Attinghausen between the Empire (the league of German-speaking States to which it was clearly in Switzerland's interest to belong) and the Emperor (Albrecht, whose personal desire for Austrian aggrandisement threatened his immediate neighbours).

Albrecht was murdered by his nephew Johannes in May 1308. Schiller has advanced the date of his death by several months in order to bring it nearer to Tell's killing of Albrecht's bailiff and representative, Gessler. Although the Swiss have ample grounds for detesting Albrecht, they are represented in the play as abhorring the manner of his death, and in this connection it is worth noting that in earlier accounts of the Tell story, though not in Schiller's drama, they are equally unhappy about the violence of Tell's own act. Both in the play and in the traditions on which it is based, the men of the Rütli are seen as essentially against the use of violence. They feel they have justice on their side and that God will provide a way to freedom without bloodshed. How far it was possible for them, or indeed for any other nation in their position at any time in history, to achieve their ends by peaceful means, is another matter and must be discussed later. But their reaction to Albrecht's death is plausible enough if one assumes them to have been blinded by their own idealism to the realities of revolution.¹

The character of Wilhelm Tell himself is entirely legendary and accounts of the same action can be found in other myths. But he had long been part of the story of the Swiss uprising and is mentioned in the two sources from which Schiller drew most material: Tschudi's sixteenth-century *Chronicon Helveticum* and Johannes Müller's *History of the Swiss Federation* published in 1786. Both accounts mingle fact with fiction and Schiller, who was himself a historian and appointed to the Chair of History at Jena University in 1789, cannot have been unaware of the fact. It seems likely that he had his tongue in his cheek when he makes Stauffacher learn the news of Albrecht's death from somebody called Johannes Müller and add the comment 'You can trust his word'. (Act Five, Scene I.)

But, of course, Schiller's interests as a historian were never allowed to interfere too strictly with his activities as a dramatist. The writer who had so splendidly invented a meeting between

¹ For a further development of this theme and for a discussion of Tell's monologue and the *Parricida* scene see the Introduction by Professor William F. Mainland to his edition of Schiller's text published by Macmillan in 1968 (St. Martin's Press, New York). Also 'A New Reading of *Wilhelm Tell*' in *German Studies for H. G. Fiedler*, Oxford, 1938, by W. G. Moore.

Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart, and allowed St. Joan to fall in love with an English soldier and meet her death on the battlefield, was not likely to be troubled by historical inaccuracies in legend if they were of the kind he could turn to theatrical account. For the most part, and with the notable exception of Tell's relationship to the meeting on the Rütli, he follows Tschudi and Müller closely. He was, in fact, dependent on source-material for his knowledge not only of Swiss history but of the country itself. The man who wrote Switzerland's national play and described her landscape with such power never set foot on Swiss earth. His wife, Charlotte, had visited the country, however, and so on three different occasions had Goethe. Goethe, indeed, had himself planned to write an epic on the Tell theme and when he abandoned it he passed his notes on to Schiller. This last fact may account for some of the 'epic' qualities present in the play—notably the refusal on the dramatist's part to treat Tell as a conventional tragic-hero and the fact that, as many critics hold, the real hero of the piece is the Swiss people. In addition to the personal memories of his wife and friend, the poet also made use of numerous guide-books and accounts of the country and echoes of his reading and his study of folk-lore and expressions can be found throughout the text.

The language of the play

Wilhelm Tell was written between 1802 and 1803 and first performed in 1804. It is Schiller's last completed play (he died in 1805 at the age of forty-five) and belongs to the period of literature and drama which the Germans call 'Weimar Classicism'. English readers encountering the work for the first time may, indeed, be puzzled by the term 'classicism' in connection with so sprawling a drama as *Tell* and since not all its classical appurtenances are apparent in the translation a word of explanation must be given.

In youth both Goethe and Schiller had come under the influence of the *Sturm und Drang* movement:¹ each had written passionate and explosive dramas whose avowed intention was to overthrow all accepted rules of composition and construction and rely entirely on the immediate inspiration of the dramatist. In

¹ See Introduction to my translation of *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Manchester University Press, 1966, pp. xii-xx.

later years both poets changed their styles under the influence of neo-classical ideals. Some of their plays, like Goethe's *Iphigenia in Tauris* and Schiller's *The Bride of Messina* seek to follow the classical pattern closely; in others—like *Tell*—the classical influence is chiefly felt in the verse form and the choice of words. Some measure of Schiller's development in this direction can be gauged if we look, even in translation, at a passage from his first play *The Robbers* and compare it with the general tenor of his later work. (In this passage Karl Moor, now the leader of a band of robbers, meets his father again. The old man has been imprisoned by his other son and declared dead—in the best traditions of *Sturm und Drang* sensationalism a dead dog has been buried in the family vault in his stead!)

MOOR: Revenge, revenge, revenge for you! Fiercely abused, profaned old man! From now on I rip away the bonds of brotherhood forever! (*He tears his coat from top to bottom.*) I curse every drop of brotherly blood in the sight of open heaven! Hear me, moon and stars! Hear me midnight sky that looked down on that appalling deed! Hear me, thrice fearful God, who rules up there above the moon, damns and avenges beyond the stars, and sends your forks of fire above the night! I kneel to you—I raise three fingers in the dreadful night to give my oath.—And if I violate my word may Nature vomit me from her domains like some evil beast. I swear never to greet the light of day again until the blood of the parricide is spilled before this stone and steams towards the sun! (Act Four, Scene V.)

We are immediately aware that the themes of revenge, parricide and violation of Natural law are common to Schiller's first play and his last. But we also notice that in *Tell* these themes, and the language that expresses them, are disciplined both by greater maturity of thought and by the iambic pentameter which has replaced the earlier prose. By the time he wrote his last plays Schiller had accepted the discipline of the pentameter so completely that he had made it his own. Its very limitations have so stretched and exercised his genius that he has acquired new suppleness and freedom that were denied him in his *Sturm und Drang* days. He uses the pentameter to represent the speech of peasants and soldiers, the calculating threats of Gessler, the love-scenes of Rudenz and Berta, the rhetoric of Melchtal and the

inner-debate of Tell. 'The style' as Professor Emil Staiger says 'suits itself to the demands of the scene'.¹ Yet over it all there lies a unity: nothing jars or seems at variance with the rest.

This unity, dependent upon the use of the pentameter, I have striven to preserve in the translation. But I have not slavishly followed Schiller's use of *stichomythia* (dialogue in alternate lines of verse), nor have I retained all his occasional rhymes, admirable though the use of both is in the original German text. My first consideration was to produce a version of Schiller's play which could be performed on the English-speaking stage. It is, after all, Schiller's most popular play and lives not only by its annual open-air performances in Switzerland, but by many other performances in conventional theatres. Whatever its excellencies are as a piece of neo-classical poetry, they are certainly equalled by its excellencies as a piece of theatrical art and in translation one cannot always satisfy both demands. Both *stichomythia* and rhyming-verse soon weary a contemporary English audience, and the poet or translator who tries to use them runs the danger of writing a false literary language that is immediately detectable to the audience. The language of Schiller at his best never has this quality. He, more than any other German poet, has passed into the common-speech of his fellow-countrymen as Shakespeare has into ours. It is the end-product of his verse as a living and exciting piece of theatre that one must attempt to retain, rather than the incidental means by which he achieved it. The whole play consists of a series of subtle adjustments between realism and stylisation and in approximating to Schiller's final effect the translator is frequently called on to use totally different means.

One outstanding example of this is the dialogue of the peasants. In German the names given to them are immediately evocative and characteristic in a way they cannot be in English. The name Ruodi, for example, (pronounced 'Ruədi') is immediately recognisable as the Swiss dialect diminutive of the name Rudolf. Names such as Kuoni, Werni and Stüssi are equally evocative. Furthermore these characters are given words that only occur in Swiss dialect and are as indicative of the speaker's provenance as the Scottish 'ken' and the Southern American 'You all'. At the same time it must be stressed that none of the peasants in

¹ See Emil Staiger, *Friedrich Schiller*, Atlantis Verlag, Zürich, 1967, p. 386.

Schiller's play actually speak what is called *Schwiizertüütsch*, or Swiss-dialect. This is a form of German universally spoken by the Swiss amongst themselves, the educated as well as the country-people, but which is so remote from standard German as to present difficulties in understanding to many non-Swiss German speakers. Quite apart from this difficulty of comprehension, however, the use of pure dialect on the Weimar stage would have been frowned upon. The first of Goethe's *Rules for Actors* demands that there shall be 'no provincialism on the stage'. The aim of Weimar was always to imitate the universal ideal rather than the provincial particular, and the prohibition of dialect, except for scenes of low-comedy, would also have been connected with the problem of training young actors. Many of these when they arrived would have had unmistakable dialectal traits in their speech and this had, of course, to be corrected. To have had an Orestes or a Tasso whose tongue betrayed his provincial German origin would have been unthinkable. Even where, as in *Tell*, the 'native woodnotes wild' might add local colour to the character, they were kept under control for fear that the serious nature of the whole play might be undermined. In translation, however, this subtle infusion of Swiss colouring is impossible and the effect of neo-realism which Schiller gains is only to be gained by a greater degree of colloquialism than he, himself, uses. The same is true of the conversation of the Austrian soldiers guarding the hat in Act Three, Scene III.

A similar kind of adjustment, though in a different sphere, has to be made in respect of the dialogue of Berta and Rudenz in Act Three, Scene II. Schiller was writing for a Court theatre in which operatic traditions were still strong. Indeed, German Court theatres in general had been developed from the Italian model and their original presentations had been Italian opera. It was, therefore, possible and even natural for Schiller to use operatic conventions as a viable form for poetic drama. He could open the scene with Berta's full-blooded aside:

Er folgt mir. Endlich kann ich mich erklären.

He's following me. At last I can speak my mind.

And follow this with four lines from Rudenz in rhyming-couplets. For him and for his audience such devices had not become staled with over-use. But it is impossible for a translator to imitate them

without running into melodramatic fustian. Happily the scene does not depend on these stylistic devices for its effect: it relies on the valid dramatic idea of Berta's first appearing to reject Rudenz and then converting him to her way of thinking. I have, therefore, abandoned the external trappings of the passage in an effort to bring out its true meaning and living dramatic significance.

Sometimes, of course, a translator is forced to modify an actual idea in the text. He is only justified in doing so, I think, when strict translation gives an inadequate or false impression to a modern audience. One reason for this may be that the original audience was more familiar with certain facts than their modern foreign counterparts. Schiller's audience, for example, were familiar with the idea of the Holy Roman Empire and would have had no difficulty in understanding Rudenz's line in Act Two, Scene I.

den Kaiser

Will man zum Herrn, um keinen Herrn zu haben.

they want

The Emperor as their master, in order to have no master.

But in translation I have rendered this more freely in order to bring out the historical implications to an English-speaking audience:

They want

An Emperor, but not Albrecht! They'd be happier
To have no king at all.

Another reason for modifying the strict meaning of the text may be that modes of expressing emotion have changed greatly since the time of the original. If the emotion in question is really germane to the play, it must, of course, be retained as closely as possible. But there are in *Tell* certain passages which, if translated strictly into modern English, become so sentimental as to destroy the strength of Schiller's true meaning. These passages particularly concern Hedwig and the boys. At the end of Act Three, Scene I, for example, Hedwig, left alone with young Wilhelm, says as she embraces him:

Ja, du bist

Mein liebes Kind, du bleibst mir noch allein.

Yes, you are

My dear child, and only you are left to me.

And in Act Three, Scene III, Walter Tell, released from his ordeal, runs to his father with the words:

Vater, hier ist der Apfel.—Wusst ichs ja,
Du würdest deinen Knaben nicht verletzen.

Father, here's the apple.—I knew, of course,
You wouldn't hurt your son.

Given an eighteenth-century audience, eighteenth-century sentiment and eighteenth-century language, such passages are possible on the stage. In the German text they are acceptable today in the same way as the sentiment in the medieval play of *Abraham and Isaac* is acceptable to us. The language of the time enables us to pass through its own stylistic veneer and perceive the universal emotion beyond. Put strictly into modern language, however, such passages embarrass us and some modification is therefore required. In both the above cases I have simplified but not, I hope, destroyed the real meaning. Hedwig says 'Yes, Wilhelm, . . . I have still got you', and Walter 'The apple, Father. . . . I knew I'd be safe.'

Such problems as these arise, of course, not only in the translation of *Tell*, but in that of Schiller's other works as well. As Stephen Spender observes, however, in the introduction to his own translation of *Maria Stuart*:¹

Fortunately Schiller is not a poet inextricably tied to the particular words he uses. The translator need not feel—as he would with Goethe—that unless he finds exactly corresponding words for the German, he is betraying the original. Schiller is unambiguous in his poetic drama. That is, he uses words to portray ideas or feelings which lie beyond the words. He wants to say things simply, clearly and melodiously, and his words are clothes in which he attires his ideas.

Certainly the words of *Wilhelm Tell* are not so closely connected to the ideas as they are in either *Faust* or *Iphigenie auf Tauris*. In both these plays style and content are so closely married that the true drama cannot be released in translation without the closest possible approximation to Goethe's original mode of expression. Even variations in metre are closely connected to the inner dramatic pattern, and when Goethe uses stichomythia in *Iphigenie*, or the pseudo-medieval rhyming verse in *Faust*, one recognises

¹ See *Mary Stuart*, translated by Stephen Spender, Faber & Faber, 1959, p. 12.

that the very nature of his subject and the particular thing he is trying to say have dictated their use. There was no such inevitability about Schiller's use of *stichomythia* in *Tell*. As a poet he uses it successfully, but as a dramatist he could have gained the same effect by other means.

The looseness of connection between style and content in Schiller frequently results in his being diffuse. He had an unerring ear for a good line in the theatre, but to get the same effect in translation one is frequently called on to be more concise. (This seems to me to be particularly true of the Rütli scene.) Coleridge, after he had translated *Wallenstein*, observed that Schiller moved in his blank-verse like a fly in a glue-bottle and complained that though his ideas had connection and variety, there was no corresponding movement in the verse itself. This is not true of the German text of Schiller's major plays and suggests, perhaps, that Coleridge's ear for the language was at fault. But it does contain a truth concerning the thought-content of certain lines in his plays. Take away the music and the alliteration and one would have the 'stickiness' that Coleridge refers to. In actual production on the English-speaking stage, of course, the present text would have to be cut. (Schiller's original production at Weimar lasted five and a half hours!) But apart from the kind of condensation of individual lines alluded to above, I have kept the standard text intact.

The character of *Tell* and the 'Parricida Scene'

Both Tschudi's *Chronicon* and Müller's *History* represent Tell as being part of the original Rütli alliance. Schiller, however, deliberately chose to represent him as a man who acted by himself. Nor does he follow the hint of the chronicle that Tell's action met with some criticism from his fellow-countrymen. On the contrary, he is universally acclaimed as the saviour of the country. This separation of Tell from the other patriots serves to bring home sharply a basic contradiction in the thinking of men like Stauffacher and Walter Fürst. Their constant aim throughout the play is to avoid bloodshed. At the Rütli meeting Fürst declares:

We'll hound the bailiffs and their lackeys, break
Their fortresses wide open—but we'll shed
No blood unless we must.

And later he congratulates Melchtal on sparing Landenberg's life:

May God
Bless you for keeping victory unstained
By wanton blood.

Stauffacher, on hearing of Albrecht's murder, expresses horror at the deed and then goes on to express satisfaction that the hands of the Swiss are pure and that they may

pick the fruit of blessing
Grown from this deed of blood.

Yet all this moralising cannot conceal from us the fact that Switzerland's freedom has been gained at the price of two murders: Gessler's and Albrecht's. One of these the audience has actually witnessed, the other has been vividly described at length. What view are we to take then of the Rütli confederates claim to have pure hands? If they are innocent, they are so by accident of fate; once the play is over and we consider their position objectively we cannot fail to notice a certain hypocrisy in these otherwise worthy characters.

I say advisedly 'once the play is over'—for if we see it at Altdorf or Interlaken the circumstances of the performance compel us to take their words at face value. When one is in the heart of Switzerland the play inevitably takes on the quality of a national pageant—a pageant, indeed, with the attendant glories of great poetry and superb stagecraft. The nature of patriotic drama often demands a certain flatness of characterisation: the business of national celebration means that we must leave certain aspects of human nature out of account. This is as true of Shakespeare as it is of Schiller. In one sense it is as irrelevant to accuse Fürst and Stauffacher of hypocrisy as it is to accuse Prince Hal of the same sin when he rejects Falstaff. This kind of criticism results, in some part, from treating a play as though it were life and refusing to recognise the conventions within which the dramatist is working.

In making this translation I have tried to preserve the validity of the play as a national epic—a dramatic counterpart to Goethe's projected poem on the subject. But, at the same time, close acquaintanceship with the text makes one aware that it is also a play of a different order. Schiller was too good a dramatist and

too aware of the contradictions in human nature to offer us merely flat characters. Hedwig Tell is a case in point. She is, of course, a typical mother,—but is she also an ideal wife for Tell? Ideal, perhaps, but not idealised. Her tendency to complain and pity herself is not absent from Schiller's lines, even though her cause for complaining has some justification. If the poet in Schiller is concerned to celebrate ideals, the dramatist still insists on seeing human characters in all their self-contradictions.

This is as true of Tell as any other character in the play. As Professor Mainland has pointed out,¹ Tell is aware that he commits murder. He makes the point quite clearly in his soliloquy:

Each traveller must journey on the way
Of his appointed task. My own—is murder.

Yet still my thoughts
Are of my children . . .
For them alone I stretch my bow to murder.

None the less:

The living
God demands such evil be avenged.

(In Schiller's text the line reads literally 'There lives a God to punish and avenge!')

Tell, then, is forced to become the agent of God's vengeance, but only at the cost of murder. It is as though two commandments were in conflict within him: 'Defend your family' and 'Thou shalt not kill'. But the one is clearly impossible without the other. Can the end justify the means? To protect the innocent, Tell must himself become guilty. And it is with blood on his hands that he returns home in the last act. As Mainland points out Tell's hand is a key image of the whole scene. Hedwig fears its touch. Her husband replies that he can raise it to heaven with impunity. But, as Mainland perceptively observes, there is no indication that he does so. The point is worth making because the play abounds in stage-directions, many of them rendered superfluous by the explicitness of the text itself. Instead of a stage-direction for Tell, here, we have one for the Monk.

(The monk makes a sudden movement and Tell becomes aware of him.)

¹ Op. cit.

What follows is one of the most criticised scenes in Schiller's drama. But it is, I believe, possible to play the scene successfully if one realises the basic ambiguity of Tell's position. He has learned, as the men of the Rütli have not, that rebellion is only possible at the cost of bloodshed. We must remember here that Schiller, in company with many other European poets who cherished the ideals of freedom, was horrified by the atrocities and brutalities of the French Revolution. He had complained in *The Song of the Bell* that the Good had given way to the Bad and every depravity had been given free rein. Echoes of the French Revolution occur in the play—notably the savage command of Armgard to her children to 'see how butchers die'. When Tell meets Johannes of Austria, therefore, it is as though he were confronting something that is in his own conscience. The man is at one and the same time outside him and within him—and, perhaps, the choice of the name 'Parricida' rather than 'Johannes' conveys this idea more strongly. Johannes is denoted by his *crime*, by one of the main aspects of it which differentiate it from Tell's *sin*. Yet, even so, Tell is forced to debate the whole issue again within himself. If we take his lines to the Parricida, up to the point at which he finally shows pity for him, as a debate within himself rather than a series of self-righteous condemnations, we suddenly see how the scene is meant to be played. What makes Tell take pity on Johannes is the realisation that he is struggling, as Tell is himself, with the problem of guilt. It is not merely that he is 'young and nobly born' or that he has killed the Emperor his uncle. The last lines of his speech lay stress on three things:

Als Morder flüchtig—hier an meiner Schwelle
Des armen Mannes—flehend und verzweifelnd.

Fleeing as a murderer—here to my door
A poor man's—beseeching and in despair.

Again the stress is on murder. And the murderer has come to *his* door, which he insists is *rein* (pure), but which we know from his soliloquy is none the less the door of a man whose God-given task was murder. And so the prince and the peasant meet in despair and soul-searching. Even so, Tell will not give him his hand. They are equals in the torment of their souls, but not in the nature of their blood-guilt.

The figure of Tell, himself, therefore, is, like the rest of the play, a compromise between realism and stylisation. As a stylised figure he is the strong, impetuous, lonely national hero. As a realistic man he is essentially what he calls himself 'Ein Mensch der Sünde'—'A man of sin'. Whether that sin can be justified, or not, is a matter for debate. Schiller does not give any answer. His other plays are sometimes criticised because his 'philosophy' as Goethe put it, led him 'to annihilate nature'. But surely in *Tell* this is not the case. The ideals, the philosophy and the weakness of human nature are all displayed together. Tell does not become, like Mary Stuart, a tragic figure who repents of his crime and accepts death as a Divine penance for it. His is a sin rather than a crime—and as E. L. Stahl has pointed out the tendency to deal with sin rather than clearly defined crime is characteristic of Schiller's plays.¹ Like all great works of art *Tell* is capable of many interpretations and beneath the theatrical fireworks and the discipline of Weimar classicism lies a deep understanding of the human predicament.

¹ See E. L. Stahl, *Friedrich Schiller's Drama*, Oxford, 1954, pp. 136–137.

Persons of the play

Hermann Gessler, *Imperial Bailiff in Schwyz and Uri*

Werner, Baron von Attinghausen

Ulrich von Rudenz, *his nephew*

Berta von Bruneck, *a rich heiress*

Rudolf der Harras, *Gessler's equerry*

Friesshardt, *a mercenary*

Leuthold, *a mercenary*

*A Public Crier

Taskmaster

†Brothers of Mercy

†Johannes Parricida, Duke of Swabia

People of Uri

Walter Fürst

Wilhelm Tell

Hedwig, *his wife, Fürst's daughter*

Walter } *Tell's sons*

Wilhelm }

Rösselmann, *the Parson*

Petermann, *the Sexton*

Kuoni, *the Shepherd*

Ruodi, *the Fisherman*

Jenni, *fisherman's boy*

Seppi, *shepherd's boy*

The Trumpeter of Uri

The Master Stonemason

‡Fisherman on Lake Uri

Fisherman's boy

Mechthild, *a peasant*

Elsbet, *a peasant*

Hildegard, *a peasant*

People of Schwyz

Werner Stauffacher

Gertrud, *his wife*

Konrad Hunn

Itel Reding

Hans auf der Mauer

Jörg im Hofe

Ulrich the Smith

Jost von Weiler
 Stüssi, *the rural-constable*
 Armgard, *a peasant*

People of Unterwalden

Arnold von Melchtal
 Konrad Baumgarten
 Meier von Sarnen
 Struth von Winkelried
 Klaus von der Flüe
 Burkhardt am Bühel
 Arnold von Sewa
 †Pfeifer von Luzern
 †Kunz von Gersau

Countryside, *men, women and children*
 Soldiers of Gessler and Landenberg
 Workmen and labourers
 A wedding-procession
 Passers-by, etc.

This list of characters has been based on that of the programme of the production of the play at the Tellspielhaus, Altdorf, 1965. It makes the cantonal allegiance of the characters somewhat clearer than the list found in most editions of Schiller's play. At the same time certain points are to be noted:

* In actual production on this occasion the role of Friesshardt was combined with that of the Public Crier.

† Roles marked with a dagger were cut from this particular production. Neither Pfeifer nor Kunz are, perhaps, strictly necessary, and the Brothers of Mercy are an anachronism since the order was not founded until the middle of the sixteenth century. In any case, the scene could end quite effectively on the speech of Rudolf der Harras. But the cutting of Johannes and the Parricida Scene is more debatable. (See Introduction.)

‡ The character of the Fisherman on Lake Uri (Act Four, Sc. I) is not listed separately in most editions and, as Professor Staiger observes,¹ is played in most productions by the actor who plays Ruodi. But it is, surely, impossible to believe that this 'King Lear of the Alps' is the same character as the man who refused to row Baumgarten across the lake. Even allowing for the fact that both characters have a boy called 'Jenni' it is manifestly clear that their styles of speech are totally different.

Schiller's original stage-directions have been retained throughout. They are interesting for the light they shed on Weimar production

¹ See Staiger, *op. cit.*

in general, and the desire for 'harmonious groupings' in particular. There is, of course, no compulsion on a modern producer to follow them. Schiller did not, of course, intend Tell to shoot any arrows—and a letter from him to the Breslau Theatre in 1804 makes the point clear. Tell palms the arrow and the speech of Rudenz causes sufficient disturbance to allow the apple to be taken from Walter's head without the audience's seeing it. In the case of the murder of Gessler, the arrow is usually concealed in his clothing and released by a spring at the appropriate moment.

Act one

Scene I

The high rocky coast of Lake Lucerne opposite to Canton Schwyz. The lake forms a creek in the land and there is a hut near the shore. The fisherboy goes by in his boat. In the distance, on the other side of the lake, we see the villages and farms of Schwyz basking in bright sunshine. To the left, from audience, the cloud-covered peaks of the Haken are to be seen; on their right a distant view of the ice-covered mountains. Before the curtain rises the Kuhreihen (ranz-des-vaches or alpine herdsman's melody) is mingled with the sound of cow-bells and this continues for a time when the curtain has risen.

FISHERBOY (*singing from his boat, melody of the Kuhreihen*)
The lake's laughing waters entice and implore,
The shepherd boy slumbers at ease on the shore:
He hears a sweet music
Like flutes arise,
Like voices of angels
In paradise.
But as he awakens, dream-caressed,
The lake is lapping around his breast.
And as they become deeper
The waters intone
'I lure thee, young sleeper,
I make thee my own.'

SHEPHERD (*on the mountain, variation on the Kuhreihen*)
Farewell to the meadows
And fields filled with sun,
The shepherd must leave them
The summer is gone.
We'll come to the mountain, our flock shall return
When the cuckoo is calling and bird-song new born,
When earth is freshly-dressed and gay
And the streams are freed by the warmth of May.
Farewell to the meadows
And fields filled with sun,

The shepherd must leave them
The summer is gone.

ALPINE HUNTER (*appearing on top of a rock at the opposite side of the stage, second variation*)

There's thunder in heaven, the foot-bridge sways,
But the bow-man stands firm on the alpine ways.
He crosses undaunted
The ice-field's sheen
Where spring never vaunted
Her shoots of green.
The misty sea that fills the glen
Beneath him, hides the homes of men.
Yet through its rifts
He sees unfurled
Deep under those waters
The verdant world.

(*The landscape changes and a muffled roar comes from the mountains as shadows of clouds chase each other across the earth.*)

Ruodi, the fisherman, enters from his hut and Werni, the hunter, comes down from the rock. Kuoni, the herdsman, enters carrying a milk-pot on his shoulder. He is followed by Seppi, his boy.)

RUODI Get a move on, Jenni! Get the boat in.
The old man of the valley's brewing up a storm.
It'll be on us sooner than we think.
The ice is rumbling and the Mythenstein
Is hooded. Cold wind fills the rainy-quarter.

KUONI We're in for a wetting, Ferryman. The sheep
Are ravenous. And my dog, there, paws the ground.

WERNI Bad weather's coming up, all right.
Look how the fish are leaping and how deep
The coots dive.

KUONI (*to the boy*) Seppi, watch the cows don't wander!

SEPPI I can tell brown Lisel by her bell.

KUONI She'll go furthest. All the rest are safe then.

RUODI Fine set of bells you've got there, master!

BAUMGARTEN Time for talking when you've saved my life!

WERNI There's blood on you! Why?

BAUMGARTEN The Emperor's bailiff—
The one on the Rossberg. . . .

KUONI Wolfenschiessen?
Has *he* set his men on you?

BAUMGARTEN He'll harm
No-one else . . . I killed him!

ALL (*falling back*) God have mercy!
How?

BAUMGARTEN Any man who calls his soul his own
Would do the same! For I invoked the rights
Of hearth and home against the violation
Of my own honour . . . of my wife!

KUONI The Emperor's bailiff
Defiled her?

BAUMGARTEN He did not fulfil his lust.
God and my trusty axe prevented that.

WERNI You struck him with your axe?

KUONI Tell us everything!
You've still time before the boat is launched.

BAUMGARTEN I was felling trees up in the wood.
My wife runs to me—fear of death upon her.
She tells me that the bailiff's in our house:
Had ordered her prepare a bath for him
Then shamefully besought her as his harlot.
She fled to seek me. As I was, I ran
Towards the cottage. Raised my axe! His bath
Was in his own vile blood!

WERNI You acted justly.
None can blame you!

KUONI So the devil gets his wages.
The debts of Unterwalden have been paid.

BAUMGARTEN The news has spread like fire. They'll track me down.

While we're talking . . . God! . . . Time's running out!

(Thunder begins)

KUONI Quick with the boat there! Get the man across!

RUODI Can't be done until this storm is over.
You'll have to wait.

BAUMGARTEN Dear God, I can't. Each moment
We delay spells death.

KUONI *(to the fisherman)* Get on with it.
For God's sake! This man is our neighbour—
Any of us could stand there in his shoes.

(Wind and thunder)

RUODI The South-wind's up. Look, how the lake is rising!
I couldn't steer against the waves and storm.

BAUMGARTEN *(clasping his knees)*
Have pity on me and Our Lord will help you.

WERNI His life's at stake. Do what you can for him.

KUONI He has a wife and children.

(Repeated thunderclaps)

RUODI What of that?
Haven't I a life to lose as well?
Wife and children waiting? You can see
The surge rising! Whirlpools in the water!
The whole lake's boiling to its depth.
God's my witness that I'd save his life
If that were possible—you see it's not!

BAUMGARTEN *(still on his knees)*
Must I fall into their tyrant-hands?—
Safety in sight upon the other shore.
There it lies! My sight can seek its bank,
My voice resound upon those distant stones
While I must lie here helpless. And despair!

KUONI Well said, Tell!

WERNI Spoken like a hunter!

BAUMGARTEN God sent you to me. You'll get me across.

TELL I can save you from the bailiff's clutch—
Another's hand must steer us through the storm.
Better you fall though in the arms of God
Than men.

(To the shepherd)

And if the mortal fate of flesh
Meets me, I beg you, friend, stand by my wife.
For what I did, I could not leave undone.

(He jumps into the boat)

KUONI *(to the fisherman)*

You call yourself a Master-Ferryman:
And haven't got the guts that Tell has shown?

RUODI There are better men than I won't follow Tell.
You won't find his equal in these mountains.

WERNI *(who has climbed on to the rock)*

He's off! Strength be in your arm! My God,
How the boat shudders in the waters!

KUONI *(on the shore)*

The waves have swallowed them! I can't see them
now!
No, they're there! He's forging through the breakers.

SEPPI The Bailiff's horsemen galloping towards us!

KUONI You're right, by God! We didn't act too soon.

(A troop of Landenberg's horsemen)

1ST HORSEMAN The murderer you're concealing—hand him
over!

2ND HORSEMAN No point in hiding him. We know he's here.

KUONI AND RUODI Which *murderer* do you mean?

1ST HORSEMAN (*seeing the boat*)

Look, out there!

WERNI (*above*)

Looking for the man that's in that boat?
Heave to, quickly! You'll catch up with him.

2ND HORSEMAN Hell and damnation! Gone!

1ST HORSEMAN (*to shepherd and fisherman*) And with *your* help!

You'll pay for this. Slaughter all their herds!
Burn the huts! Raze them to the ground!

SEPPI (*rushing after them*) The lambs!

KUONI (*following*)

My cattle!

WERNI

Damned barbarians!

RUODI (*wringing his hands*)

Almighty God of Justice, when will You send
Help to our poor country?

(*He follows them*)

Scene II

Steinen in Canton Schwyz. A lime tree in front of Stauffacher's house that stands on the roadside near a bridge.

Werner Stauffacher and Pfeifer von Luzern enter talking.

PFEIFER Why, yes, Herr Stauffacher, it's as I told you.
If you can avoid it, take no oath
To Austria. Keep allegiance to the Empire
As you always have. And God preserve your freedom.

(*Presses his hand fervently and is about to go*)

STAUFFACHER But you will stay until our hostess comes.
You're my guest in Schwyz, as in Lucerne
I'm yours.

PFEIFER Thank you, I've got to get to Gersau.
Whatever further woes the arrogance
And greed of their commission brings, I beg you

But I was quick to counter it. 'The Emperor's',
 I answered him. 'My own liege-lord and yours.'
 Then he said he was dubbed the Emperor's Regent
 And would not brook the farmers' building houses
 Upon their own initiative—as though
 They owned the country. 'I will make so bold,'
 He said, 'Forbid them do it.' He rode off,
 Vicious as ever—left me sombre thoughts.

GERTRUD Dearest, will you let me speak? I'm proud
 To be an Iberg, daughter to a man
 Who drank life deeply. When the elders gathered
 At night beside my father's fire, discussing
 The country's welfare, poring over parchments
 The former Emperor granted us; we sat,
 We sisters, spinning wool and gleaning wisdom.
 We learned what wise men thought and good men
 wished
 And I have stored those secrets in my heart.
 So listen! Mark my words. I'm not a stranger
 To your distress. I knew it long ago!
 The bailiff bears a savage grudge against you.
 You're in his path because the men of Schwyz
 Refuse allegiance to the Austrian King—
 —Though we still keep the loyalty that our fathers
 Rightly held—allegiance to the Empire.
 Tell me, Werner, if I'm wrong.

STAUFFACHER

It's true.

That is the grudge that Gessler bears against me.

GERTRUD He envies you the happiness of living
 On your inheritance here, when he has none.
 Emperor and Empire have assigned
 This house to you. And you can prove your title
 Just as the Emperor can to his dominions.
 You recognise no master but the crown
 Of Christendom itself! The king is nothing—
 Only his father's youngest son! Owns nothing
 Except his cloak of knighthood! So his venom
 Squints enviously at honest men's good fortune.

He's vowed your downfall. Will you wait until
His malice strikes? A wise man is prepared.

STAUFFACHER What can I do?

GERTRUD (*coming closer*) Why, all good men in Schwyz
Bemoan the bailiff's greed and tyranny!
So make no doubt that those in Unterwalden
And Uri have grown weary of the yoke.
We have Gessler. On the other shore
There's Landenberg—and every bit as brazen.
Never a boat that comes, but brings fresh news
Of new atrocities, new inroads made
Upon the people's freedom. Now's the time
For you, and those of your good-will, to ponder
How we can free ourselves. I promise you
The Grace of God will fortify your cause.
Have you no friend in Uri you could offer
The candour of your heart?

STAUFFACHER A host of friends—
Men that I trust. Respected noblemen.
But, woman, what a holocaust of danger
You waken in my heart! My inmost soul
Drawn to the light of day and turned to face me!
What I forbade my thoughts you prattle lightly.
Have you weighed what you say? Are you prepared
To plague this peaceful valley with the clash
Of arms and brawling conflict? How shall we—
Weak shepherds as we are—presume to pitch
Battle with the Lords of Earth? They only
Wait their excuse—that's all—to unleash their hordes
On this poor country. Then, they'll trample it
With hooves of victory. They will make a pretext
Of just reprisal to destroy the titles
To freedom which we've held so long.

GERTRUD You're men
As they are—have been trained to wield the axe.
God blesses courage.

STAUFFACHER War's a raging scourge
That kills the shepherd with the sheep.

1ST WORKMAN Is there *no* mercy in your bowels?
You'd force that poor old devil there to work?—
He can't drag one foot before the other.

MASTER-MASON AND WORKMEN
It stinks to heaven!

TASKMASTER You get on with it!
I do what's my duty.

2ND WORKMAN Would you tell me
What they're goin' to call this fort we're building?

TASKMASTER The Keep of Uri's what they're going to call it.
And a proper yoke to *keep* your necks well down!

WORKMEN The keep of Uri!

TASKMASTER What is there to laugh at?

2ND WORKMAN They hoping to keep the whole of Uri down
With this tin-pot erection?

1ST WORKMAN Now, I wonder—
How many of these mole-hills would you need
Piled together to reach our smallest mountain?

(Taskmaster goes upstage)

MASTER-MASON
I swear I'll drown the hammer that I've used
To build this Devil's pile.

(Tell and Stauffacher enter)

STAUFFACHER I would to God
I'd never lived to see this.

TELL But we serve
No good by staying. Let's be on our way.

STAUFFACHER Can I believe that I am still in Uri—
The land of freedom.

MASTER-MASON You should cast your eyes
On the dungeons down below, Sir! Coeks could crow
Till kingdom-come. They'll never hear 'em there.

STAUFFACHER O God!

MASTER-MASON Do you see those walls and buttresses?
They're built to last.

'TELL What human hands have built
They can destroy again.

(Pointing to the mountains)

The walls of freedom
Were built for us by God.

(A drum is heard. Several people enter carrying a hat on a pole and followed by a public-crier. A crowd of women and children pour in after them.)

1ST WORKMAN Hey! What's the drum for?

MASTER-MASON Carnival procession! Why the hat?

CRIER Oyez! Oyez! In the Emperor's name!

WORKMEN Shut up a minute! Let's hear what he says!

CRIER Men of Uri, see this hat! We cause it
To be erected in the highest place
Of Altdorf's centre, where the Bailiff's edict
Wills it receive the honour due to him.
All men shall bow their knee to it and doff
Their hats in reverence. By this act's observance
The king shall see the loyalty of his people.
Those that defy the order forfeit goods
And person to His Majesty.

(The people laugh loudly. The drum is beaten. They go off.)

1ST WORKMAN So that's
The latest, is it? Honouring a hat!
D'you ever hear the like?

MASTER-MASON Are we to grovel
To his wretched cap? What kind of children's game
Does he think he's playing with us?

1ST WORKMAN It's not as though
He'd put up the Emperor's crown. I've seen that thing

STAUFFACHER But can you
Dismiss the common cause so coldly, Tell?

TELL There's only one person that a man can count on—
Himself!

STAUFFACHER If the weak unite, they're strong.

TELL Yes! But the strong are strongest by themselves.

STAUFFACHER You mean to say we can't rely on you
If we defend ourselves against affliction?

TELL I'll rescue any lamb from the ravine:
Do you believe that I'd forsake my friends?
All that I ask—whatever course you take—
Is leave me from your counsels. I've no time
For such deliberation. When you need
Action call on *me*—and I'll be there.

(They go out severally. A sudden commotion round the scaffold.)

MASTER-MASON *(rushing in)*
What is it?

1ST WORKMAN *(coming forward, shouting)*
The slater's fallen off the roof!

(Berta enters with attendants)

BERTA *(as she comes in)*
Is he badly hurt? . . . Get help quickly!
Here's gold if you need it . . .

(She throws some jewellery down amongst the people)

MASTER-MASON All you think of
Is gold! There's a price on everything! You tear
Fathers from children, sunder man and wife,
Sow seeds of misery across the world
And hope to make it good with gold! Get out!
Out of Switzerland! We were happy men
Before you came. You taught us to despair.

BERTA *(to the Taskmaster as he returns)*
Is he alive?

MELCHTAL

My one anxiety

Is my father. He sorely needs a son's protection.
The bailiff's got his knife in him—he'll never
Let him rest. The old man champions freedom
And right too well! And now he lacks a shield—
I've *got* to go to him.

WALTER FÜRST

No, you must wait.

Wait until we hear from Unterwalden.
Someone's knocking! Go inside! It could be
A messenger from the bailiff. No, no, go!
You're not safe from Landenberg's arrest
Anywhere in Uri. Tyrants have long arms.

MELCHTAL They teach us how *we* ought to act!

WALTER FÜRST I'll let you know when the coast is clear.

(Melchtal goes inside)

How can I tell the poor wretch what my fears
Forbode?—Who's there?—I never hear the hinge
Grate on the door without I fear misfortune.
Treachery and despair in every corner!
The inmost alcoves of the house invaded
By the oppressors. Soon we'll stand in need
Of bolts and locks on every door.

(He opens the door and steps back astonished as Werner Stauffacher enters)

Herr Werner!

In God's name, man, you're welcome. No-one better
Has crossed this threshold. What brings you to Uri?

STAUFFACHER *(giving him his hand)*

The old times and the Switzerland that we knew.

WALTER FÜRST Those you bring with you. Oh, it warms my heart

To see you. Sit, Herr Werner! And your wife—
Frau Gertrud, Iberg's daughter, wise as he,
How did you leave her? No-one comes this way
From Germany by Meinrad's cell to Rome
Without they praise your hospitality.

But tell me—did you come straight here from Flüelen
Or did you stop elsewhere?

STAUFFACHER I did indeed!
I gasped—I mourned—to see their preparations.

WALTER FÜRST Yes, my friend—a single look tells all.

STAUFFACHER We've never had the like of it in Uri.
There's been no fortress here in living memory.
And no houses locked, except the tombs.

WALTER FÜRST The tomb of freedom! Yes, you're right.

STAUFFACHER Herr Walter,
I did not come from idle curiosity:
I come oppressed with care. I left affliction
In my house, I find affliction here.
Our plight is unendurable. And I see
No end to the oppression. Switzerland
Was free when time began. We are accustomed
To fair treatment. Since the shepherds drove
Their first sheep to the mountains, we have never
Experienced such evil.

WALTER FÜRST No, even Baron Attinghausen,
Who saw the old times, is of the opinion
It's not to be endured.

STAUFFACHER Blood pays the price
Even in Unterwalden. Wolfenschiessen—
The Emperor's bailiff on the Rossberg—lusted
Forbidden fruit. In Alzellen he tried
To rape Baumgarten's wife. The husband seized
His axe and slew him.

WALTER FÜRST The courts of heaven are just.
Baumgarten's anger suffers long. They saved him?
Kept him in hiding?

STAUFFACHER Your own son-in-law
Took him across the lake. I've kept him safe
At Steinen in my house. He spoke of more
Atrocities in Sarnen—they'd draw blood
From every honest heart.

WALTER FÜRST (*with greater attention*) At Sarnen? What?

STAUFFACHER In Melchtal, near the road from Kerns, there lives
Heinrich von Halden. A respected man.

WALTER FÜRST Everyone knows him. But what's happened?
Tell me!

STAUFFACHER Landenberg had sentenced Halden's son
For some peccadillo. Confiscated
His two best oxen from the plough.
The boy thrashed the servant and absconded.

WALTER FÜRST What of the father . . .?

STAUFFACHER Landenberg sent for him.
Demanded he produce the boy. When Halden
Swore, with perfect truth, he had no knowledge
Where the boy had fled, they tortured him.

WALTER FÜRST (*rising and trying to draw him aside*)
No more, I beg you!

STAUFFACHER (*raising his voice*) 'Though I've lost your son
I've got you!' They cast him to the ground
And plunged their sword-points through his eyes . . .!

WALTER FÜRST O God!

MELCHTAL (*rushing in*) His eyes, you say?

STAUFFACHER (*astonished, to Walter Fürst*) Who is . . .?

MELCHTAL (*seizing him vigorously*) Tell me! His eyes?

WALTER FÜRST God have mercy on him!

STAUFFACHER Who . . .?

(*Walter Fürst gives him a sign*)

His son!

Almighty Saviour!

MELCHTAL I was forced to leave him.
Both . . . eyes . . .?

WALTER FÜRST Courage! Take hold of yourself.

MELCHTAL To pay my trespass! Answer my offence!
Blinded then? Quite blind? In utter darkness?

STAUFFACHER All sight has left him: daylight turned to dark.

WALTER FÜRST Spare him!

MELCHTAL Dark eternal! Dark forever!

(He presses his hands to his eyes, remaining silent for a moment. Then he turns from one to the other, speaking in a low voice choked with tears.)

O what a bountiful gift is heaven's light.
All living things who glory in creation
Live by her power. The plants, themselves, will turn
Joyfully to her, yet he must grope
Through night unending. All the burnished flowers
And sun-warm meadows quicken him no longer.
He'll look no more upon the russet snow
Of yester-year. To die is nothing! Live—
And yet not see—perdition! Why d'you look
Pityingly on me? I've two good eyes.
But neither can I give to my blind father,
No shimmer from this brilliant sea of light
That floods so blindingly before my eyes.

STAUFFACHER I have no balm to give you; I am forced
To augment your suffering further. All his goods
Fell to the bailiff. All but a staff to guide
His blind, near-naked way from door to door.

MELCHTAL Eyeless and old! And only grudged a staff!
Stripped of possessions, sundered from the sun,
The beggars' common heritage. I'll hear
No further talk of staying here concealed.
What ignominious craven thought impelled me
To foster my security, not *yours*.
I forfeited your head to their cruel hands.
No more of caution's cowardice! I'll think
Only of bloody retribution now!
Cross the lake! No arms shall keep me here!
I will exact my father's eye from him—

I'll find the bailiff, though a thousand horsemen
Hedge him round. My life is nothing till
I cool this smoking anguish in his blood.

(He makes to leave)

WALTER FÜRST Stay here! What can you do against the bailiff?
He's safely housed at Sarnen in his fortress.
He can afford to mock our puny anger.

MELCHTAL If he were housed within the halls of ice
That crown the Schreckhorn's summit—or still higher
Where the great Jungfrau sits forever veiled—
I'd find him. And a score of youthful hearts,
Pulsing with mine would batter down his walls.
If none support me, if your common fear
For herds and huts subjects you to the yoke,
I'll summon every shepherd to the hills
And where the endless roof of heaven breeds
Untainted spirits, wholesome hearts, proclaim
Transgression's weight of crime.

STAUFFACHER *(to Walter Fürst)* The tide is full:
Shall we wait till extremity . . . ?

MELCHTAL What extremity
More to be dreaded than the orb of sight
Imperilled in its socket? Do we have
No arms? Why were we taught to stretch the bow?
To wield the heavy battle-axe? All creatures
Are granted their defence against despair:
The stag at bay will take his stand and turn
His fearful antlers on the hounds, the chamois
Will lure the hunter into the abyss,
And even the beasts who plough and share man's
dwelling
And suffer harness to the mighty strength
Of muscled necks, when once provoked, will rise,
Point their horns and toss their foes sky-high!

WALTER FÜRST If all three cantons thought as we three think,
We'd stand a chance.

STAUFFACHER

If Unterwalden helps
When Uri calls, the men of Schwyz will honour
The old alliance.

MELCHTAL

I have friends unnumbered
In Unterwalden. All would gladly wager
Life and blood if others shield and back them.
Fathers of my country, I stand here
A youth to your experience—my voice
Must hold a modest silence in the state.
But do not scorn my counsel, though it lacks
Knowledge of life. Not youth's impetuous blood
But cruelty's anguish drives me with a pain
So keen, the mountain crags must pity it.
You are both fathers and would wish your sons
Revere your sacred heads and keep inviolate
The eye's frail sphere. Because your lives and goods
Are still unharmed, the orbit of your sight
Still free, do not reject this woe of ours,
Oppression's sword hangs over you as well.
You both refuse the claims of Austria—
My father's crime was nothing more than that!
You stand condemned with him! You share his guilt!

STAUFFACHER (*to Walter Fürst*)

Make your decision. I will follow it.

WALTER FÜRST We need advice from Baron Attinghausen,
Von Sillinnen as well. Their names would win us
Many supporters.

MELCHTAL

Where in all the mountains
Are any names more honoured than your own?
Their worth will conjure faith, they are acclaimed.
Your fathers' merit, dowered to you, grows richer.
What do we need with noblemen? Let *us*
Achieve our end. I would to God we stood
Alone—to learn to be our own protection!

STAUFFACHER

The nobles are still spared our misery—
This torrent that goes raging through the depths
Has left the heights untouched. But when they see
The country armed, they won't refuse us aid.

WALTER FÜRST If there had been some arbitrator set
Between ourselves and Austria, then justice
Could weigh the issue. But the Emperor
Is judge omnipotent—and our oppressor.
So God must help us through our own resource.
You sound the men of Schwyz. I'll seek for friends
In Uri. Unterwalden . . . ?

MELCHTAL Send me there.
No-one has better cause.

WALTER FÜRST I can't allow it.
You are my guest, I cannot risk your safety.

MELCHTAL No, let me go. I know the hidden routes,
The mountain ways. I've friends to shelter me.

STAUFFACHER In God's name, let him go. There's little risk
Of traitors over there. They hate oppression
Too much to serve it. Baumgarten can ply
For allies too, and rouse the lands that lie
Below the forest.

MELCHTAL How can we inform
Our friends without the Austrians suspecting?

STAUFFACHER We'll meet at Brunnen, or at Treib perhaps
Where the merchants land their boats.

WALTER FÜRST We can't afford
'To work so openly. Here's my advice:
Left of the lake, as you go down to Brunnen,
Opposite the Mythenstein, there lies
A meadow hidden in the wood. The shepherds
Call it 'The Rütli', because there the trees
Are cleared.

(To Melchtal)

It marks the boundaries of our lands.

(To Stauffacher)

An easy journey in a skiff from Schwyz.
We'll take untrodden ways at dead of night

To hold our secret council. Let each man
Bring ten trusted friends of his own heart.
In common we'll discuss our common needs
And by God's aid resolve them.

STAUFFACHER

Yes, so be it.

Give me your worthy hands and take each other's.
As we, in secret, pledge our threefold faith
Without reserve, we pray that our three cantons
Should stand, bound each to each, for life and death.

WALTER FÜRST AND MELCHTAL

For life and death!

(They continue to grasp each other's hands for a moment in silence)

MELCHTAL

Father, old and blind,

You will not see the day of freedom rise,
But you shall hear it. When the fires flame out
Their sign from alp to alp and tyrant-towers
Are crumbled into dust, the Swiss will run
Rejoicing through your hut until delight
Echoes within your ears. And day dispels your night!

(Exeunt severally)

Act two

Scene I

The Manor of Baron von Attinghausen.

A Gothic room decorated with armorial bearings and helmets. The Baron is an old man of eighty-five: a tall, noble figure with a staff tipped with a chamois' horn, and dressed in a fur doublet. Kuoni and six other serving-men stand round him, rakes and scythes in their hands. Ulrich von Rudenz enters in knight's costume.

RUDENZ I'm here, Uncle. What is it you want?

ATTINGHAUSEN First let me honour custom in the drink
Of morning, shared together.

(He drinks from a goblet which is then passed from one man to the next)

I was never
Absent from the woods and fields till now.
My eye would guide the labours of my men,
As they would look to see my banners lead them
Into battle. Now I do no more
Than supervise them from afar, and if
The sun won't send his warmth to me, I cannot
Go out to seek it on the mountain-slopes.
Now with confinement ever-more confined,
I creep towards the last and straightest pass
Where life stands still. Am nothing but my shadow,
Soon I shall be nothing but my name.

KUONI *(to Rudenz, bringing him the goblet)*
The cup, my Lord.

(As Rudenz hesitates to take the goblet)

Drink deep: One cup—one heart!

ATTINGHAUSEN Go my sons. When evening brings your ease
We shall discuss the business of our land.

(Serving-men go out, leaving Attinghausen and Rudenz)

You wear your belt and sword. Are you intending
To go to Altdorf, to the Herrenburg?

RUDENZ Yes, Uncle, and my time is short . . .

ATTINGHAUSEN (*sits*) So pressing?
What? Are the hours of youth so stinted, then,
You must retrench them to an aged uncle?

RUDENZ I see that you require me here no longer:
I'm alien to your house.

ATTINGHAUSEN Alas that's true!
And alien to your country. Uly! Uly!
I do not know you any more. You glisten
With silk, parade yourself in peacocks' feathers.
That purple mantle buckled on your shoulder
Disdains your fellow countrymen. You blush
To hear their honest greeting.

RUDENZ I don't grudge them
Honour where it's due. I do deny them
The rights they usurp.

ATTINGHAUSEN The whole of Switzerland
Smarts with the Emperor's anger! Every heart
Suffers the bruising force of tyranny.
Yet you are cold to it! We watch you stand
Aside from all our suffering, in the ranks
Of Switzerland's enemies! Mocking our despair,
Chasing fickle pleasure for the favour
Of those whose lash has cut our flesh to blood.

RUDENZ Why *is* the country so oppressed?—Why, Uncle?
Who was it plunged her in this misery?
One word suffices—one light word, that's all—
To rid us of oppression instantly!
'To win the royal approval! Woe betide
Those men who blinker up our people's eyes
So that they kick against their own advantage!
These are the men who prosper their affairs
By hindering our oath to Austria.
The lands around have long since sworn allegiance.
But no! It suits their purposes to sit

That music which presumption lets you scorn.
 On alien earth that sound will strike your heart
 With bitter yearning, for the spell that binds
 Man to the earth that bore him will not weaken.
 The false unfriendly world is not for you.
 In all the pride of that imperial court
 Your heart will never find itself. The world
 Demands far different qualities from those
 These valleys have inured in you. Go there
 And forfeit your free soul! Take land in fief,
 Become a prince's lackey, when you might
 Be prince and autocrat of your inheritance.
 Uly! Uly! Stay with your own people.
 Do not go to Altdorf and desert
 Our holy cause. My line must end with me—
 The arms that hang there will be buried with me—
 Am I to know then, at my dying breath,
 You merely wait the clouding of my eyes
 To go to Austria and receive in fief
 The lands which I have held from God outright?

RUDENZ We can't resist the king. The world is his.
 Are we to stand alone, stiff-necked and stubborn,
 Breaking the chain of lands he forges round us?
 His the markets. His the law-courts. His
 The trade routes, and the mules that trudge along 'em
 Towards the Gotthard have to pay his taxes.
 His territory entraps us like a net!
 And what's the Empire going to do to save us?
 Can it protect itself from Austria's growth?
 If God won't help us, then no emperor can!
 Who cares a fig for what an emperor says
 When war or penury would make him sell
 Those very cities who have sought protection
 From his imperial eagle's wing? No, Uncle!
 Foresight compels us in these times of faction
 To ally ourselves with strength. The Emperor's crown
 Passes from line to line. It won't remember
 Loyalty. We must sow future seed
 If we're to harvest thanks from those in power!

ATTINGHAUSEN So wise, you see more clearly than your fathers?—

Who gave their blood and heroes' strength to gain
The jewel of freedom? Take ship for Lucerne,
Ask there what Austria's brute dominion means.
They'll take a census of our sheep and cattle,
Measure our grazing-grounds, preserve the game
And wildfowl in our woods! Put up their turnpikes
On every bridge and gate! Our poverty
Shall be the price of their prosperity,
Our blood pay for their wars. If we *must* stake
That blood, then let it be for us! The price
Of freedom is less dear than slavery.

RUDENZ How can we shepherds challenge Albrecht's armies?

ATTINGHAUSEN Learn to know this race of shepherds, boy!
I know them, for I've led them into battle—
I have watched them fighting at Faenza.
They dare to thrust a yoke on us, that we're
Determined not to bear? O learn to feel
The blood that sired you in your veins! Don't cast
The pearl of your true worth away for show
And tawdry toys. Make this your noble boast:
That you are called the leader of free men
Who loyally stand by you through war and death
And dedicate their hearts to you in love.
Tighten those bonds which bound you at your birth,
Join forces with the fatherland we cherish
And hold it fast. The roots of strength are here.
There, in the alien world, you stand alone.—
A fragile reed for every storm to break.
But come! You have not seen us for so long!
Spend one day here—and do not go to Altdorf.
Don't go today! You hear me? Don't refuse
Your family this one day.

(Takes his hand)

RUDENZ

I gave my word.
You must excuse me. . . . I am duty bound.

ATTINGHAUSEN (*forcefully, as he releases his hand*)

Yes, you are bound. . . . Not only by your oath,
But by the bonds of love!

(*Rudenz turns away*)

You cannot hide it.
Berta von Bruneck draws you to the fortress,
Makes you the Austrian's slave. You hope to win
The lady's hand by treachery to us.
The bride is bait, but she will not be given
Until you're deep in sin!

RUDENZ

I'll hear no more!

I take my leave, Uncle. God be with you.

(*Exit*)

ATTINGHAUSEN Boy, have you lost your senses! Wait. . . . He
goes—

I cannot stop or save him. Wolfenschiessen
Forsook his country thus, and more will follow.
The foreign sorcery exudes its power
To lure impatient youth beyond these mountains!
Unhappy hour when feet of strangers bruised
These still, contented valleys and destroyed
The inviolate innocence of ancient use.
The new invades us brutally, the old
And deeply valued leaves. New days have dawned!
A race of different thinkers fills the earth.
What use am I? The men with whom I ruled
And lived my life are long within their graves.
And blessed are they whose breath is spared the time
to come.

(*Exit*)

Scene II

*A meadow surrounded by high cliffs and woods.
On the cliffs are terraced paths with handrails, and ladders from
which we shall later see the country-people descending. At the back*

of the stage is the lake and at the beginning of the scene a moon-rainbow. In the distance are high mountains and beyond them still higher ice-covered peaks. Total night covers the stage. Only the lake and the white glaciers glisten in the moonlight. Melchtal, Baumgarten, Winkelried, Meier von Sarnen, Burkhardt am Bühel, Arnold von Sewa, Klaus von der Flüe and four others enter—all armed.

MELCHTAL (*still off-stage*)

The path's broader here. Keep in my tracks!
I recognise that cross there on the rock.
We've got to the Rütli at last.

(*They enter with windlanterns*)

WINKELRIED

Listen!

SEWA

'The place

Is empty.

MEIER

Not a soul. We Unterwaldner
Seem to be the first.

MELCHTAL

What time is it?

BAUMGARTEN The watch from the Selisberg called two.

(*A bell is heard in the distance*)

MEIER

Quiet! Listen!

AM BÜHEL

It's the mattins bell
From the chapel in the woods of Schwyz. How clear
it sounds!

VON DER FLÜE The air's so pure it travels far.

MELCHTAL

You men
Set the brushwood kindling. Get it blazing
Before the rest arrive.

(*Two men go*)

SEWA

The lake is calm.
A mirror to the beauty of the moon.

AM BÜHEL They'll have an easy crossing.

WINKELRIED (*pointing to the lake*) Look, up there!
Can't you see it?

MEIER What? . . . Why, yes, by heaven!
A rainbow in the middle of the night.

MELCHTAL Born of the moonlight.

VON DER FLÜE That's a wondrous omen!
Very few on earth have seen that sight!

SEWA It's double! Look, a paler ring above it!

BAUMGARTEN A boat underneath it!

MELCHTAL Stauffacher's!
He wouldn't keep us waiting.
(Goes down to the shore with Baumgarten)

MEIER It'll be
The Urner who take longest.

AM BÜHEL They've got to dodge
The bailiff's spies and circuit through the mountains.
(Meanwhile the two men centre stage have lit a fire)

MELCHTAL (*from the shore*)
Who goes there? Give the word!

STAUFFACHER (*from below*) The friends of Switzerland.

(All move upstage towards the new arrivals. Stauffacher, Itel Reding, Hans auf der Mauer, Jörg im Hofe, Konrad Hunn, Ulrich the Smith, Jost von Weiler, and three other countrymen enter—all carrying arms.)

ALL (*calling*) Welcome!

(While the others greet each other upstage, Melchtal comes down with Stauffacher.)

MELCHTAL O, Herr Stauffacher, I've seen
Him, who will never look on me again.
I laid my fingers on his eyes—drew up

From that dark burned-out sun that was his sight
The scorching sense of vengeance.

STAUFFACHER

Not revenge!

Nothing shall be revenged. We only counter
Threats of future evil. Tell me, then,
How you have served our cause in Unterwalden.
What is the people's mind? How did you foil
The snares of treason?

MELCHTAL

By a mountain journey

Across the wild Surennen's empty fields
Of far-extending ice, where only vultures
Raise their hoarse cries. I reached the alpen-pasture
Where shepherds out of Engelberg salute
Herdsmen of Uri and a common ground
Feeds both their flocks. I stilled my thirst with milk
Of glacier-water foaming in the runnels,
Rested in lonely shepherd-huts—was both
My host and guest until I reached the warmth
Of human settlements. The valleys rang
Already with reports of new affliction.
My own misfortune, everywhere I knocked,
Had paved my wandering way with deep respect.
And indignation fired their souls against
Tyranny's dominion. As the Alps
Nurture in perpetuity the same
Unchanging herbs, and as their streams pursue
Unaltered courses, winds and even clouds
Retain unvaried routes—so ancient habit
Is rooted fast in all their generations,
They'll bear with no presumptuous innovation
Shaking life's steady pace. They offered me
Their calloused hands, took down long-rusted swords.
And when I spoke the names they hold in reverence
There in the mountains—yours and Walter Fürst's—
Exultant courage flashed from every eye!
What you consider just, they swear to do.
They'll follow you on oath to death.—I hurried
From farm to farm, protected everywhere
By blessed hospitality. I reached

The valley of my birth where kith and kin
 Are settled far and wide. I found my father . . .
 Blinded and robbed . . . on borrowed straw . . . still
 living
 By merciful benevolence. . . .

STAUFFACHER

Dear God!

MELCHTAL I did not weep. I could not waste the strength
 Of white-hot suffering in enfeebled tears,
 I locked it fast within my heart of hearts,
 Cherished it as a treasure. And I turned
 My thoughts to action! Crossed the sinuous hills,
 Spied out the hidden valleys till I reached
 The glacier's ice-encrusted foot in search
 Of habitation. Everywhere I trod
 Hate of oppression flourished. Even there—
 The final frontier of created life
 Where stubborn earth yields nothing—still they
 plunder!
 My tongue turned spur to all these worthy men
 Till they were ours in heart and voice.

STAUFFACHER

You've acted

Well and quickly!

MELCHTAL

I have done much more.

The people fear the fortresses at Rossberg
 And Sarnen, for the Austrian's ravage us
 Too easily from those rampart-walls' protection.
 I was determined to see them for myself.—
 I went to Sarnen and I did.

STAUFFACHER

You risked

The tiger's den?

MELCHTAL

I wore a pilgrim's habit.

I saw the bailiff revelling at his table—
 Judge, then, if I'm master of my heart:
 I saw my enemy and let him live.

STAUFFACHER God Almighty! Heaven blessed your courage.

But let me meet these noble friends you came with.
Let us lay bare our hearts in mutual trust.

STAUFFACHER Neither are names unknown to me. It was
A Winkelried who lost his life at Weiler
Slaying a serpent in the swamps.

MELCHTAL (*indicating two men*) These two men
Are from the monastery at Engelberg,
Behind the forest. Think no less of them
For serfdom and the lack of heritage
That blesses us. They stand in good repute
And love their country.

KONRAD HUNN This is Herr Reding:
The People's Representative.

STAUFFACHER Well said!

WINKELRIED Listen!
Uri's coming. Can't you hear the horn?

(On both right and left armed men are seen descending the cliffs. They carry lanterns.)

AUF DER MAUER Isn't that the parson? There's a good
Shepherd for you! He cares for his flock

Three mountain-peoples fill this friendless shore
 At dead of night: what spirit shall inform
 The brotherhood they make beneath the stars?

STAUFFACHER (*entering the circle*)

It is no new-born brotherhood. Renewal
 Of old alliance, rather! Old as time.
 Let all who take this oath remind themselves
 That though the lakes and mountains sundered us
 And every canton rules itself, we are—
 And stay—one blood, one race! We came
 As exiles from a common father-land.

WINKELRIED Is there some truth, then, in the minstrel's tale
 Of exile from a distant land? If so
 The old alliance shall enhance the new.
 Tell us what you know!

STAUFFACHER

Hear what the shepherds say:

The curse of famine lay upon a land
 Beyond the northern night. To ease its woe
 The elders of the mighty nation ruled
 That lots be drawn, and one in every ten
 Sent to exile. So, indeed, they were.
 Both men and women wound their mournful way
 Towards the southern sun. They waged a path
 Through Germany to reach these highland woods,
 Postponing rest to gain those tangled vales
 Where now the Muotta runs between the fields.
 No trace of men except a lonely hut
 Down on the shore. A single traveller
 Waiting for the ferry. But the lake
 Was vexed beyond the power of man to venture.
 And so they turned to scrutinise the land,
 And saw the woods were rich, the waters pure.
 The cherished fatherland was theirs at last!
 Here they would stay, they said. They founded
 Schwyz
 And suffered many bitter days to clear
 The tortuous roots of woodland. But with time
 That earth could not sustain their growing number.

They went to the Black Mountain, to the white
 Unmelting walls of ice behind whose mass
 Lived other men with other tongues. They founded
 Stanz in Kernwald.—In the Reuss's valley
 The market-town of Altdorf. But remembrance
 Of origin was never dimmed. And though
 So many races share their earth since then,
 The men of Schwyz still claim their kin. One heart,
 One blood is their instinctive badge!

(He shakes hands with those right and left of him)

AUF DER MAUER

One heart,

One blood that's shared by all!

ALL *(shaking hands with one another)*

We are *one* people!

And we will act as one.

STAUFFACHER

The other nations

Have bent their necks to foreign conquerors.

Even within these frontiers many pay

Alien dues and pass their serfdom on

To their descendants. But the true-born Swiss

Preserve their freedom. We've not bent the knee

To princes! For the Emperor's protection

Was ours by choice.

RÖSSELMANN

The Emperor Friedrich's letter

Proves it was so. Free choice made him our shield.

STAUFFACHER The greatest freedom, though, bespeaks some
 master!

Some judge, some head, must settle strife. Our fathers

When they'd reclaimed this wilderness, accorded

That honour to the Emperor whose title

Embraced all Germany and the lands beyond.

And in return, as all his freemen did,

Vowed service in the noble cause of arms.

That—and that only—is the obligation

Of freemen: to protect the crown that shields them.

MELCHTAL To go beyond that is to be a slave!

STAUFFACHER Summoned, they fought his battles and pursued
 The Imperial Banner—marched to Italy

To gain the Emperor his Roman crown.
 But here at home they ruled themselves. Preserved
 Their laws and customs. His power was confined
 To capital offences. For that purpose
 He chose a neutral overlord, who came,
 When blood was spilt, and judged impartially
 Beneath God's heaven. Is there any trace
 Of slavery here? Let him who thinks so answer!

IM HOFE It's as you say. Force never made us yield.

STAUFFACHER We even dared refuse the Emperor
 Obedience, when he bent the law for priests.
 The monastery at Einsiedeln, remember,
 Coveted our ancient grazing-grounds.—
 Concealed the fact we used them. And the Abbot
 Produced an old parchment that entitled
 Him to the no-man's wilderness. We told them
 His claim was trumpery—that the emperor
 Couldn't make presents of our own possessions.
 And if the Empire wouldn't grant our rights
 We'd do without its ward! When our fathers
 Spoke so bravely, are we going to knuckle?
 Take, from foreign vassals, infamy
 We would not brook from the imperial crown?
 Our hands gave us this land and cleared the woods
 Of savage bears; the swamp of venom-swelled
 Covey of serpents! We tore down the veils
 Of grey eternal mist that cloaked the waste,
 Split up the rocks and built the wanderer
 Safe crossing of the gorge. This settlement
 Has been our own a thousand years! And shall
 The vassals of a foreign lord enchain us?
 Insult us in our home? Are we resourceless?

(General reaction from the countrymen)

No! I say no! For tyranny has bounds.
 When justice is denied and burdens grow
 Intolerable, then misery may reach
 Courageously to heaven! And bring down
 Eternal right that hangs immutable,

ALL (*striking their swords*) Wives and children!

AUF DER MAUER What!
Recognise . . . ?

WINKELRIED Traitor!

REDING Peace!

SEWA Accept the Austrians
After what they've done to us?

VON DER FLÜE And be bullied
Into accepting what we wouldn't take
From kindness?

MEIER We'd be slaves! *Deserve* to be them!

AUF DER MAUER Any man who speaks of giving in
Should lose his rights! I appeal to you, Herr Reding,
Make it the first law we pass tonight.

MELCHTAL Why not? Capitulation to the Austrians
Is advocated only at the cost
Of right and honour. None to entertain
The traitor at his fire.

ALL (*raising their right hands*) Make that the law!

REDING (*after a pause*)
The law is passed.

RÖSSELMANN

That law has set you free.

Force shall not gain where soft entreaty failed. . . .

JOST VON WEILER Back to business!

REDING

Brothers in the oath,

Are we so sure that peaceful means have failed?

Perhaps the Emperor's not informed. Perhaps

It's not his will that we should suffer this.

Let us not leave this last resource untried:

Before we take up arms inform the king

Of our complaint. For force is always hideous,

Though right condone it. God will only help

Where human aid is powerless.

STAUFFACHER

Tell them, Hunn!

HUNN

I went to Rheinfeld—to the Emperor

To fetch the titles of our ancient freedom

Which every king has ratified. I also

Sought to complain against our suffering.

The emissaries sent by Swabian towns,

And from the Rhineland too, received their parch-
ments.

They left contented. But when my turn came

To face the council, I was turned away.

'The Emperor had no time for us at present:

He would, of course, consider our case later!'

My heart was sinking as I crossed the halls

And met Count Johann in an alcove, weeping.

The Lords of Wart and Tegerfeld were with him.

They called me. Told me 'You must help yourselves—

Look to find no justice from the Emperor.

Has he not even dared defraud his nephew

Of his inheritance? He is of age

And sues to rule his mother's lands and people,

His answer is a petty coronet—

A trinket for a child!'

AUF DER MAUER

You heard him, friends!

No justice from the Emperor! Help yourselves!

REDING

There is no other way. We must decide

The best means to success.

WALTER FÜRST (*entering the circle*) We want to banish
Violence and uphold our ancient rights,
Not grasp at innovation heedlessly.
A master has his dues. Let what the Emprcor
Rightly owns be duly granted him.

MEIER My land is held in fief from Austria.

WALTER FÜRST Then still fulfil your duty.

JOST VON WEILER I pay taxes
To the Counts of Rappersweil.

WALTER FÜRST Don't cease to do so.

RÖSSELMANN I'm vowed to Our Lady's Church in Zürich.

WALTER FÜRST Then render to the Cloister what is hers.

STAUFFACHER The Emperor is my liege. . . .

WALTER FÜRST What must be done
To uphold the law we'll carry out. No more!
We'll hound the bailiffs and their lackeys, break
Their fortresses wide open—but we'll shed
No blood unless we must. We'll show the Emprcor
We do not fail in duty till compelled.
And where he sees restraint in us, his sense
Of state-craft may subdue his wrath. A nation
In arms, but yet controlled, commands respect.

REDING How can we *do* that, when the enemy
Is armed himself? As long as there is peacc
I tell you he won't weaken.

STAUFFACHER Once he secs
Our weapons rise, he will. We shall surprise him—
Give him no time to mobilise his troops.

MEIER Easier said than done! If they invade us
They can take cover from the fortresses
Of Rossberg and Sarnen. Rid ourselves
Of those threats before we raise our swords!

STAUFFACHER Wait till then and you will give 'em warning!
Too many men would have to share the secret.

WALTER FÜRST And if we take the castles on that day,
Smoke-fires shall signal triumph from the mountains.
The last reserves then muster in each canton.
And when the bailiffs see our arms mean business,
Rely upon it, they'll capitulate,
Be glad to take safe conduct to our borders!

STAUFFACHER I'm still afraid that Gessler will resist.
His power lies in his body-guard of troopers,
He'll want blood before he leaves the field—
Expel him and he's still a threat! It's hard,
Dangerous perhaps, to spare *his* life.

BAUMGARTEN If any have to risk their necks, let me!
I thank Tell for my life. I'll wager it
To serve my country. I have saved my honour,
My heart's at peace.

RÖSSELMANN Time brings the wisest counsel.
Wait! And allow the hour to shape its need.
While we have met by night the day has come
Posting her radiant watch upon the peaks.
Break up! Before the light surprises us.

WALTER FÜRST No need to fear. The night is loth to leave
The valleys.

(All have involuntarily removed their hats and stand in silence watching the sunrise)

RÖSSELMANN By this light which greets us first
Of all the men who draw their weary breath
Within the smoke of cities far beneath us,
Let us now swear the oath of new alliance.
We seek a single brotherhood of men
Inseparable in danger and in need.

(All repeat his words with three fingers raised)

We seek that freedom which our fathers knew
Preferring death to life in servitude.

(As above)

And on Almighty God we set our trust,
Undaunted by the power of men.

(As above. All embrace each other)

STAUFFACHER

Let all

Return, then, quietly to their friends. The shepherd
Shall bring his sheep to winter-quarters safely
And find out friends to swell our brotherhood.
What must be borne till then, shall be endured.
For tyranny's account shall not be met
But left to grow till all is paid together:
Both private woe and common grief. Till then
Bridle your righteous anger, spare revenge
Until the public hour. For those that seek
To remedy injustice for themselves
Will only violate the common good.

(As all depart quietly in three different directions the orchestra strikes up a soaring and majestic air. The stage remains empty for a moment to reveal the spectacle of the sunrise over the ice-capped mountains.)

Act three

Scene I

Courtyard in front of Tell's House.

Tell with a carpenter's axe in his hand, Hedwig busy with housework.

Walter and Wilhelm are playing with a small cross-bow up-stage.

WALTER (*sings*)

With his bow and arrows
Through the hills and dales
The brave hunter hurries
When the morning pales

Prince of air's dominion
Is the kite on wing.
In the mountain-kingdom
There the huntsman's king.

Far as eyesight carries,
Far as arrow's flight,
All that flies or tarries
Is his prey by right.

(Runs to Tell)

My bow-string's broken. Would you mend it, Father?

TELL Oh, no! Good bowmen do their own repairs.

(Boys go away)

HEDWIG It's early for the boys to shoot.

[illegible][illegible]

TELL They've got to learn all things—
Tackle life bravely, shielding right with might.

HEDWIG They'll find no peace at home.

TELL

I have none, Mother,

Nature did not turn me out a shepherd.
 She made me restless, made my quarry fleeting.
 Life has no tang till each day dares afresh.

HEDWIG

You don't think how a woman waits and frets.
 Sometimes I'm horrified to hear the tales
 They tell of your foolhardiness. I never
 Bid you goodbye without my heart is trembling.
 I see you lose your bearings in the mountains—
 In storm and ice. Or miss your footing, leaping
 From one rock to the next. I watch the chamois
 Jump back and draw you with him to the abyss.
 I see the wind set off an avalanche
 That smothers you. The treacherous ice give way
 And you sinking live into its tomb.
 Death has a hundred ever-changing forms
 To trap the rash hunter, whose cruel trade
 Leads him to risk his neck at every gorge.

TELL

Let a man keep his head and look around him,
 Trusting in God and his agility—
 And there's no danger he can't wrestle with.
 Those that the mountains reared, don't need to dread
 'em.

(He has finished his work and puts the tool down)

There now! That gate will hold for donkey's years.
 Keep an axe and spare the carpenter.

(Takes his hat.)

HEDWIG

Where are you going?

TELL

Altdorf—to see father.

HEDWIG

Nothing more? No danger? Tell me the truth.

TELL

Why do you ask?

HEDWIG

I know they're planning something
 Against the Bailiff. And they held a meeting
 On the Rütli. You're involved with them.

TELL I wasn't on the Rütli—but I shan't
Refuse my country when she calls.

HEDWIG They'll post you
Where the danger's worst. They always do.

TELL Every man's taxed according to his means.

HEDWIG The man from Unterwalden—you defied
The storm to row him here. And it's a miracle
That you were saved. But could you spare no thought
For your own family?

TELL Yes, I thought of you.
That was why I saved him . . . for his children.

HEDWIG Venturing on the water did not show
Trust in God! It tempted Him!

TELL We do
Precious little if we think too long.

HEDWIG You're good and kind. A friend to everybody.
But when *you* need assistance, no-one's there.

TELL God forbid that I should need their help.

(Takes his cross-bow and arrows)

HEDWIG Why take your cross-bow? You can leave it here.

TELL I leave my right-arm where I leave my weapons.

(Boys come back)

WALTER Where are you going, Father?

TELL Altdorf, boy.
To grandfather's. Want to come along?

WALTER I'll come.

HEDWIG You mustn't go—the Bailiff is in Altdorf.

TELL He's leaving there today.

HEDWIG Wait till he's gone.
You know the grudge he bears us. Why remind him?

HEDWIG *Because* there is no reason! . . . Stay here, Tell!

TELL No, my dear, I promised I would go.

HEDWIG Go if you must, then. But don't take the boy.

WALTER Mother, I should like to go with Father.

HEDWIG And leave me?

WALTER I'll bring you back a present
From Grandfather!

(Exit with his father)

WILHELM I'll stay with you, Mother.

HEDWIG *(embracing him)*

Yes, Wilhelm . . . I have still got you.

(She goes to the gate and stands watching Tell and the boy as they depart)

Scene II

A wild confined woodland region with waterfalls splashing from the rocks. Berta in hunting-dress. Later Rudenz.

BERTA If he follows, I must speak my mind.

RUDENZ *(entering quickly)*

At last I can speak to you alone.

No-one will see us in this wilderness,

Ravines all around us . . .

BERTA Are you sure
The hunt isn't following?

RUDENZ They're a long way off.
It's now or never. I must take this moment
To see my fate decided, even though
It means I might not see you anymore.
Don't muster such a sombre look.—Who am I
To dare aspire to you? I'm still a stranger

RUDENZ

I see you the crown
Of women and your woman's magic weaving
The spell of heaven through my home. As spring
Brings blossoms, you will bring your grace to gild
My life. The air around you shall be filled
With living gladness.

BERTA

Dearest, you see now
Why I wept to watch you throw away
This greatest happiness of all. How could I
Accept the hand of some proud conqueror,
Endure his castle's blackness? There will be
No castle here to keep me from the people
I long to serve!

RUDENZ

How can I start again?
How can I break the noose of my own folly?

BERTA

Make up your mind you must be free of it.
Whatever happens—don't desert your people.
That's your place by birth.

(Hunting horns in the distance)

The hunt is closer.
Fight for Switzerland and you fight for me.
We share one enemy—await one freedom!

(Exeunt)

Scene III

A meadow near Altdorf. In the foreground trees, backstage the hat on a pole. In the distance the Bannberg with snow-capped mountains beyond.

Friesshardt and Leuthold keeping watch.

FRIESSHARDT Waste of time, keeping-watch! Who's goin'
'To come and make his reverence to a hat?
Most days, now, it's like a fair-ground here.

Ever since they stuck that scarecrow up
The meadow's been deserted.

LEUTHOLD

Only scum

Come and annoy us. Shake their tattered caps.
Decent folk'll take the long way round
Rather than bend their backs to this.

FRIESSHARDT

But when

They come from the town-hall at twelve o'clock
They've got to cross this square. All right, I thought!
I'll make a good catch! They'd all forgotten.
Then up bobs Father Rösselmann—just back
From visiting the sick—sees how things are,
And posts himself complete with Sacrament
Before the pole! The Sexton rings his bell
And the whole lot fall down on their knees—
Me included. But they did obeisance
To the Holy Monstrance not the Austrian hat.

LEUTHOLD

I think we're losing face by standing here!
It's a damned disgrace for cavalymen to stand
Guarding an empty hat. They'll laugh at us,
Bowing down to that! It's idiotic!

FRIESSHARDT

What's the difference in an empty hat?—
You grovel before enough empty heads!

(Hildegard, Mechthild, Elsbet and children enter and stop by the pole)

LEUTHOLD

You can talk, can't you? Servile swine!—
You like nothing better than plaguing honest people.
Me, I don't give a damn who passes by here:
I'll shut my eyes to it.

MECHTHILD

There's the Bailiff, boys.
Show him your respect!

ELSBET

I wish to heaven
He'd go and leave his hat. The country wouldn't
Be the worse for it.

FRIESSHARDT

(chasing them off) Get out! Bloody women!
Why don't you send your husbands over here?
See if they've got the guts to defy the order.

(Tell enters with his cross-bow. He is leading his son by the hand. They pass the hat without paying any attention to it and come downstage.)

Father, they say the trees up there will bleed
If you strike them with an axe.

WALTER The master shepherd. And he said a spell
Protected them. If anybody harmed them
He said their hands would grow out of their graves.

WALTER The glaciers
That groan all night and cause the avalanche.

WALTER (*after a moment's thought*)
Are there any countries
Without mountains?

WALTER Why don't we
Go down there if the land's so beautiful?
Why stay here with misery and fear?

TELL The country's fair as heaven, but its people
Can't enjoy the blessing that they sow.

WALTER Don't they own their lands like you?

TELL The fields
Either belong to the Bishop or the King.

WALTER Haven't they got woods to hunt in, then?

TELL The overlord has claimed the birds and beasts.

WALTER Surely they can go fishing in the rivers.

TELL The king owns the rivers and the sea.
He even owns the salt.

WALTER Who is the king
They're all so afraid of?

TELL The only man
Who feeds them and protects them.

WALTER Can't they manage
To protect themselves?

TELL Down there no man trusts
His neighbour.

WALTER I should feel shut in down there—
I'd rather live below the avalanche.

TELL Yes, boy—better glaciers at your back
Than evil men.

(They are about to cross the stage)

WALTER Look at the hat up there!

TELL What's it got to do with us? Come on.

(As he is about to go, Friesshardt confronts him with a raised pike)

FRIESSHARDT Stand! In the Emperor's name!

TELL *(grasping the pike)* Why hold me up?

FRIESSHARDT You've broken the order. You must come with us.

LEUTHOLD You made no obeisance to the hat.

TELL Let me go on my way, friend.

FRIESSHARDT

Yes—to prison.

WALTER Prison!

(Calling off)

Help! Someone help me! Help!

They're taking my father to prison! Help him! Help!

(Rösselmann the parson and Petermann the sexton enter with three other men)

SEXTON What's the matter?

RÖSSELMANN Why arrest this man?

FRIESSHARDT He's a traitor and an enemy to the Emperor.

TELL *(seizing him with force)*

Me, a traitor?

RÖSSELMANN No, friend, you're quite wrong.

This is Tell—a loyal citizen.

WALTER *(sees Walter Fürst and rushes to him)*

Grandad, they've seized father!

FRIESSHARDT You're under arrest.

WALTER FÜRST *(hurrying towards them)*

I will stand surety for this man.

In God's name, Tell, what's happened?

(Melchtal and Stauffacher enter)

FRIESSHARDT , He refuses

To recognise the authority of the bailiff.

WALTER FÜRST Tell refuses it?

MELCHTAL That's a lie!

LEUTHOLD He didn't

Bow his knee to the hat.

WALTER FÜRST And you arrest him?

Take my security and let him go.

FRIESSHARDT Bail your own bones out! We do our duty.

Take him away.

MELCHTAL (*to the people*) Are we to let brute force
Take him off before our eyes?

SEXTON There are
More of us. Don't stand for it. The rest
Will back us, friends.

FRIESSHARDT Which of you dare defy
The bailiff's order?

THREE OTHERS (*hurrying in*)
What can we do? What's up then? Knock 'em down!
(*Hildegard, Mechthild and Elsbet return*)

TELL I can look after myself. Go home, good friends.
If violence was called for, do you think
I'd fear their pikes?

MELCHTAL (*to Friesshardt*) Just try to take him off!

WALTER FÜRST AND STAUFFACHER
Quietly! Steady!

FRIESSHARDT (*shouting*) Revolt! Revolution!
(*Hunting-horns are heard*)

WOMEN It's the bailiff!

FRIESSHARDT (*still louder*) Mutiny! Revolution!

STAUFFACHER Shout till you burst your lungs!

RÖSSELMANN AND MELCHTAL Be quiet! Shut up!

FRIESSHARDT (*louder still*)
Help! Help the Officers of Justice!

WALTER FÜRST That's the bailiff. We're lost. What happens
now?

(*Gessler enters on horseback, a falcon on his wrist. He is followed by Rudolf der Harras, Berta and Rudenz and a large retinue of soldiers who form a circle of pikes enclosing the whole stage.*)

RUDOLF DER HARRAS
Way for the Bailiff, there!

GESSLER

Get them back!

Why are these people here? Who called for help?

(General silence)

Well, who was it? I want to know! *(To Friesshardt)*

You, there!

Who are you? What's the charge against this man?

(He gives the falcon to an attendant)

FRIESSHARDT A man-at-arms, Your Honour. I was detailed
To keep watch by the hat. I arrested
This man for ignoring it. Leastways,
I was about to arrest him, but the people
Mutinied to save him. . . .

GESSLER *(after a pause)*

And do you
Despise your Emperor so greatly, Tell,
And me, his representative, that you
Refuse obeisance? And reject obedience?
Your treachery is made apparent to me.

TELL

I ask forgiveness, Sir. What I have done
Was oversight and not contempt. The world
Knows me for a man who acts on impulse.
In future I shall take more care.

GESSLER *(after a pause)*

They say
That you're a master with the cross-bow, Tell.
You never miss your mark.

WALTER

That's so, my lord.

He can shoot an apple from a tree
A hundred paces off.

GESSLER

Is this your boy?

TELL

Yes, my lord.

GESSLER

Have you any other children?

TELL

I've got two boys.

GESSLER

And which do you like best?

TELL

I love them both equally, my lord.

Enough, my Lord!

GESSLER

WALTER FÜRST (*throwing himself down in front of Bailiff*)

WALTER TELL

Don't kneel to him,

STAUFFACHER (to Gessler)

Does this child's

RÖSSELMANN

You must answer

GESSLER (*pointing to the boy*)

Tie him

WALTER TELL

I'll not be tied!

I'll stand as still as a lamb, won't even breathe.
If you tie me, I'll be forced to struggle.

RUDOLF DER HARRAS Let me bind your eyes, boy.

WALTER TELL

I am not

Afraid. I'll stand quite still till father shoots.
 Not blink even! He does not believe
 That you're a marksman, Father, and he wants
 To kill us both. . . . Show him that you *are*!
 Spite their tyranny. . . . Shoot and hit!

(He goes to the lime-tree and the apple is put on his head)

MELCHTAL *(to the people)*

Are we going to stand and watch this outrage, then?
 For God's sake, why did we take the oath?

STAUFFACHER We can do nothing—we've no weapons.
 A forest of lances round us.

MELCHTAL

If we'd only

Taken action! God forgive the men
 Who counselled waiting.

GESSLER *(to Tell)*

Well, get on with it.

You don't bear arms for nothing. It is dangerous
 To carry lethal weapons—they recoil.
 When peasants claim the right to them, their pride
 Insults the Emperor. No man shall go armed
 Unless he holds authority. Since, however,
 It pleases you to sport a bow and arrow
 I shall dictate the target.

TELL *(stretching the crossbow for the arrow)*

Open the lane!

STAUFFACHER You can't do it, Tell! Your hand's shaking,
 Your knee's unsteady.

TELL *(letting the cross-bow fall)* My head spins!

WOMEN

O God!

TELL *(to the Bailiff)*

Don't make me do it! Here's my heart!

(Tears open his shirt)

Call your troopers and have done with me.

GESSLER I want you to shoot. I do not want your life.

You can do everything, Tell. You flinch at nothing.
The tiller of a boat—a bow and arrow—
All's one to you. You fear no storms. You save
The lives of all who call on you. Now save
Your own.

(Tell stands in dreadful conflict with himself. His fingers twitch, he looks first at the Bailiff and then up to heaven. Suddenly he puts his hand into his quiver and draws out a second arrow which he conceals in his jerkin. The Bailiff watches all these movements closely.)

WALTER TELL *(under the lime-tree)*

I'm not frightened. Father, shoot!

TELL I have to do it!

(Pulls himself together and takes aim)

RUDENZ *(who has been standing tense the whole time and restrained himself by force, steps forward)*

Stop, my Lord! No more!

This was a test . . . Its purpose is achieved.
Tauten the bow of discipline too much—
It snaps, and wise restraint will miss its goal.

GESSLER Give your advice when asked, Sir!

RUDENZ I will speak,
And I'm entitled to. The Emperor's honour
Is something I hold sacred, but authority
Such as you dare to wield engenders hate.
I lay my life it's not the Emperor's will.
My people have not earned barbarity
And you lack warrant for it.

GESSLER You presume
Too far!

RUDENZ Till now I've held my tongue. And shut
My eyes to evil. Kept my heart's revulsion
Locked within me, though it swelled. But now
Silence would stab my Emperor and my country.

BERTA *(throwing herself between him and the bailiff)*
You'll swell his anger!

RUDENZ

I forsook my people,
 Denied my blood and wrenched the bonds of nature
 To join with you, believing that I furthered
 The best, by strengthening the Emperor's power.
 My eyes are opened. Horrified, I gaze
 At the abyss to which you led me. You deceived
 My judgment's freedom, you decoyed my heart,
 Till good intention almost made me bring
 My people to perdition.

GESSLER

Will you dare
 Use this tone to me—your Lord?

RUDENZ

My Lord
 And Master is the Emperor! Not you!
 I was born free as you and rate myself
 Your equal in the qualities of knighthood.
 Were you not sent here in the Emperor's name—
 A name I honour though its servants shame it—
 I'd throw my gauntlet down, requiring you
 To answer by the laws of chivalry.
 Yes! Call your troopers.

(indicating the people)

I am not like *them*—
 Unarmed. My sword is here. If anyone
 Dares approach me . . . !

STAUFFACHER (*shouting*)

Look! The apple's fallen!

(While all have been occupied with Rudenz's side of the stage and Berta has thrown herself between him and the bailiff, Tell has fired the arrow)

RÖSSELMANN The boy's alive!

SEVERAL VOICES

He hit the apple!

(Walter Fürst staggers and almost falls. Berta supports him.)

GESSLER (*astonished*)

No! . . .

The madman dared to shoot . . . ?

I knew I'd be safe!

BERTA Merciful heaven!

STAUFFACHER God be praised!

RUDOLF DER HARRAS

As long as the mountains stand, they'll praise Tell's skill.

(Gives the apple to the Bailiff)

GESSLER By God, he hit the centr. Masterly!
 And I commend him.

RÖSSELMANN All praise to the marksman.
Woe to the man who made him do it, though.
It tempted God.

STAUFFACHER It's over, Tell. Stand up.
You've acted like a man. You're free. Go home.

RÖSSELMANN Get the boy back to his mother quickly.

(They try to lead him off)

GESSLER Wait, Tell.

TELL (*returning*) What's your command, Sir?

[illegible]

TELL (*confused*)

It's . . . common practice with us bowmen, Sir.

GESSLER I won't accept *that*. A different explanation.
Tell me the truth, whatever it may be,
Without fear or favour. In return
I grant your life. Now, why the second arrow?

TELL You have assured my life: I speak the truth.

(*He draws the arrow from his jerkin and looks threateningly at the Bailiff*)

If I had killed my son, the second arrow
Was for you. I'd not have missed again.

GESSLER I gave my word of knighthood you'd be spared.
I keep that promise. But you have confessed
Malignty and shall be kept confined
Where neither sun nor moon shall shine upon you.
Nor shall I need to fear your arrows there.
Take him! Bind him.

(*Tell is bound*)

STAUFFACHER God has shown His hand
To save this man! You dare do this to him?

GESSLER Let us see if God's hand will save him twice!
Get him on board my barge. I'll follow you.
I, myself, will see him brought to Küssnacht.

RÖSSELMANN Beyond his own canton?

SEVERAL VOICES That's illegal!
You can't do that. The Emperor couldn't do it.
It goes against our freedom.

GESSLER Can you show me
Titles for your freedom? Has the Emperor
Ratified them? He has *not*! Such favours
Follow obedience only. You have all
Revolted against the Emperor's jurisdiction.
I know you and see through you. Though I take
This man only, all of you are guilty.
The wise will hold their tongues and learn obedience.

(Exit. Berta, Rudenz, Harras and soldiers follow him. Friesshardt and Leuthold remain.)

WALTER FÜRST *(in great distress)*

It's all over. He's determined to destroy us—
Me and all my family.

STAUFFACHER

But why
Did you have to bait the devil?

TELL

Is the man
Who suffered what I have suffered to watch his words?

STAUFFACHER Everything's lost. Everything! We're all
Chained and bound with you.

PEOPLE *(gathering round Tell)*

Our last hope
Goes with you.

LEUTHOLD *(approaching)* I'm sorry, Tell. . . . I must
follow orders.

TELL God be with you!

WALTER TELL *(nestling close to his father in great distress)*
Father!

TELL *(raising his arms to heaven)* There's your Father.
Pray Him to protect you.

STAUFFACHER

Have you no
Message, Tell, that I can give your wife?

TELL *(clasping the boy fervently to his heart)*

The boy is safe . . . And God will not desert me.

(He quickly tears himself free and follows the men-at-arms)

Act four

Scene I

The eastern shore of Lake Lucerne.

A background of the oddly shaped steep western cliffs. The lake is stormy. Heavy wind and surge. Thunder and lightning from time to time.

Kunz von Gersau. A fisherman and his boy.

KUNZ Believe me, I saw it. It all happened
 As I told you.

FISHERMAN Tell a prisoner, led to Küssnacht!—
 The bravest arm in Switzerland if it came
 To fighting for our freedom.

KUNZ Gessler took him
 Aboard himself. And they were just embarking
 From Flüelen when the storm came up. It sent
 Me scurrying to a landing-place all right—
 Must have delayed them too.

FISHERMAN So Gessler's got him.
 Mark my words, he'll bury Tell so deep
 He'll never see the light of day again.
 The bailiff'll fear his just revenge too much
 To free a man that he's provoked.

KUNZ They say
 That Baron Attinghausen nears his end.

FISHERMAN The final anchor of our hope has failed then.
 For he was the only man who'd dare to raise
 His voice to save the people's rights.

KUNZ The storm
 Has got the upper-hand. I'll go and look
 For shelter in the village. God be with you!
 The lake will see no more of me today.

(Exit)

FISHERMAN Tell taken prisoner. And the Baron dead.
So tyranny can lift her brazen face
Casting all shame aside. The lips of Truth
Are dumb! The eye is dark! The arm that should
Have saved us, bound!

BOY Hail-stones! Better come
Into the hut, Father. It's too ugly
To stay outside.

FISHERMAN Let the winds go mad,
The lightning fork its flame. The thunder-clouds
Burst and disburse the streams of heaven here
Until the land's submerged and quickening seed
Of unborn generations is destroyed.
The unbridled elements assume control,
The bears return, the wolves come down to claim
The wilderness. It shall be theirs once more,
For who will live here now that freedom's dead?

BOY 'The wind fills the gorge. The tumult's raging.
'The ravine has never raged like this.

FISHERMAN A father
Was never ordered to direct his bow
'Towards his own son's head! Shall the abhorrence
Of Nature not unleash itself in fury?
I should not gasp to see the cliffs incline
'Towards the lake, the pointed towers of ice
That have not melted since creation's dawn
Dissolve in dew and leave their lofty peaks.
'The mountains crumble, the primaeval gulfs
Shatter. And a second flood consume
The sinful dwellings of the earth.

(A bell is heard)

BOY They're sounding
The bell on the mountain. That must mean a boat
In danger somewhere. And they ring the bell
For us to pray.

(He climbs to a high place)

FISHERMAN I pity any boat
 Cradled in this inferno. Neither helm
 Nor helmsman will avail it, for the storm
 Is master. And the wind and waves play ball
 With human flesh. There is no bay at hand
 To shelter them. The rocks bear sheerly down.
 No hand can grasp their steep unfriendly face.

BOY (*pointing left*)
 A boat coming from Flüelen, Father. Look!

FISHERMAN God help the poor creatures. Once a storm
 Is pent up in the creek, it rages like
 A frightened beast of prey that beats against
 The iron ribs of its cage and howls in vain
 To find escape. The cliffs that reach the sky
 Wall up the winds inside the narrow strait.

(He climbs to the higher place)

BOY Why, that's the Bailiff's barge from Uri, Father.
 You can recognise the red roof and the flag.

FISHERMAN Judgment of God! It is the Bailiff, boy.
 He's taken ship and all his sins go with him.
 The arm of vengeance wastes no time. He'll learn
 What it's like to serve a stronger lord.
 The waves will not subside because he tells 'em,
 The cliffs won't bow before his hat.
 I tell you, boy, don't pray, but let the arm
 Of judgment strike.

BOY I pray for Tell, not him.
 Tell's with him on the boat.

FISHERMAN O, blind unreason
 Of all the elements! Will they destroy
 The helmsman and the ship to punish one man's guilt?

BOY They'd passed the Buggisgrat and then the storm
 Rebounded on them from the Devil's Minster—
 Is hurling them back, full-force, to the Axenberg!—
 I can't see them anywhere.

FISHERMAN

There's many
Boats have found the Hackmesser their grave.
If navigation fails 'em there, the barge
Will splinter on the towering rocks that fall
Sheer to the water's depth. They've got a helmsman
On board to save 'em. But they've bound his hands.
If any man could bring them through, it's Tell!

(Wilhelm Tell enters with the crossbow. He rushes in, looks uncomprehendingly round him and is clearly racked by deep emotion. He throws himself down centre-stage, stretching out his hands first to the earth and then to the sky.)

BOY *(noticing him)*

That man . . . kneeling . . . Father!

FISHERMAN

Grasping the earth
Like one possessed.

BOY *(coming forward)*

It is him, Father. Look!

FISHERMAN *(coming up)*

Tell? . . . God in Heaven! You here, Tell?

BOY

We thought you were a prisoner on the boat.

FISHERMAN

They told us that they'd taken you to Küssnacht.

TELL *(standing up)*

I've been set free.

FISHERMAN AND BOY

It's a miracle. Set free?

BOY

How did you get here?

TELL

From the boat.

FISHERMAN

But how?

BOY *(at the same time)*

Where's the Bailiff?

TELL

Battling with the waves.

FISHERMAN

I can't believe it. How did *you* get here?
How did you escape?

TELL

By Grace of God.

FISHERMAN AND BOY But tell us . . .

TELL Have they told you what went on
In Altdorf?

FISHERMAN Yes, I heard. What happened then?

TELL You know I was arrested and that Gessler
Was taking me to Küssnacht?

FISHERMAN Yes, we know.
You sailed to Flüelen. How did you get free?

TELL I lay there in the boat, bound fast with ropes—
Powerless, helpless.—Didn't dare to hope
I'd ever greet the sun again, or see
The faces of my wife and children. Gazed
Hopelessly across the empty water.

FISHERMAN For pity's sake . . . !

TELL And so we made our way,—
The Bailiff, Harras and the men-at-arms.
My bow and quiver lay beside the steersman
Back at the stern. And as we cornered round
The little Axen, God decreed such sudden
Murderous tempest in the Gotthard's maw
'That every heart sank at the oar and all
Believed they'd drown. A servant turned to Gessler.
I heard him say, 'You see the danger, Sir.
We're trembling at the brink of death! The steersmen
Are strangers to these waters and their fear
Has paralysed their wits. But Tell is strong
And he knows how to steer! So why not use him
In our emergency?' The Bailiff turned
'To me. 'If you will dare to help us, Tell,
Out of the storm,' he said, 'I'll cut your bonds.'
And I replied that, with God's help, I'd dare
Attempt to save us. So my ropes were cut.
I took the helm and steered a proper course.
I glanced down to my side and saw the bow,
And scanned the shore, sharp-eyed, for some quick
chance

To escape. I saw a flat reef running out
Into the water . . .

FISHERMAN I know where you mean—
The great Axen's foot. But, man, you couldn't
Leap on to *that*. It's much too steep.

TELL I gave the order to go boldly forward
Until we reached the ledge. I let them know
Once we were there the worst would be behind us.
They rowed swiftly. When the spot was reached
I prayed to God to help me and I used
My last ounce of strength to force the stern
Against the rock-face. Then I grabbed my bow
And vaulted to the bank. My force impelled
The quaking vessel to the waters' maw.
God send it where He will across the waves!
He saved me from the storm and from worse fate
At human hands.

FISHERMAN He wrought a miracle
By you. Belief is almost stunned. But where
Will you go now? You can't be safe if Gessler
Survives the storm.

TELL He said on board he'd land
Near Brunnen, head through Schwyz towards his
castle.

FISHERMAN Making his way by land?

TELL That's his intention.

FISHERMAN You must find cover then. And quickly too!
God will not save you from his hands again.

TELL Which is the nearest way to Arth and Küssnacht?

FISHERMAN The open route's by Steinen. But my boy
Can bring you by a quicker less-known way
Across Lowerz.

TELL (*shakes his hand*) God reward your kindness.
(*He goes and turns*)

I think they said that you were on the Rütli.

FISHERMAN I was. I took the Oath of Brotherhood.

TELL Then go to Bürgeln quickly. Be so good
As to tell my wife—who must despair for me—
That I am free and well concealed.

FISHERMAN But where
Am I to tell her you have taken refuge?

TELL Her father will be with her. Others, too,
Who took the oath. They must not give up hope.
Tell them to be brave for Tell is free
And master of his arm. They'll hear from me.

FISHERMAN What do you plan to do? You can speak freely.

TELL When I have done it, you will hear.

(Exit)

FISHERMAN Well, Jenni,
Show him the way. And may the Lord stand by him!
Whatever's in his mind—he'll do it, boy!

(Exit)

Scene II

The Court of Baron Attinghausen.

The Baron, in an arm-chair, dying. Walter Fürst, Stauffacher, Melchtal and Baumgarten occupied with him. Walter Tell kneels before the dying man.

WALTER FÜRST All's over with him. He has gone.

STAUFFACHER Not yet.
He does not lie there like a dead man. Look!
The feather at his lips is quivering.
His sleep is peaceful. Every feature smiles.

(Baumgarten goes to the door to speak to someone.)

WALTER FÜRST (to Baumgarten)
Who is it?

BAUMGARTEN (*returning*)

Your daughter's come to speak to you.
She wants to see the boy.

(*Walter Tell rises*)

WALTER FÜRST

What consolation
Have I for her? Or for myself? Are all
The sorrows of this world heaped on my head?

HEDWIG (*forcing her way in*)

Where's the boy? You've got to let me see him!

STAUFFACHER This is a house of death. I beg you . . .

HEDWIG (*rushing to the boy*)

Wälty!

You're still alive.

WALTER TELL (*holding her*) Mother!

HEDWIG (*gazing at him anxiously*)

Is it true?

You're not hurt? How could he . . .? Aim . . . at you?
O he's a heart of stone! How could he raise
His bow?

WALTER FÜRST

He had to save them both. He was . . .
Afraid . . . His soul was torn . . .

HEDWIG

If he'd a drop
Of father's-blood within him, he'd have died
A thousand deaths first.

STAUFFACHER

No, no. Think rather
Of heaven's Grace which so directed . . .

HEDWIG

Can I
Forget what *could* have happened? O, dear God,
If I live eighty years, I'll always see
The child tied up . . . the father taking aim.
And it will be *my* heart the arrow tears.

MELCHTAL If you had seen what provocation Gessler . . .

HEDWIG

How barbarous can a man's heart be? Insult
His pride and he'll cast caution to the wind.
He'll gamble—blindly—with a wife's affection,
A child's flesh and blood.

BAUMGARTEN

And is Tell's fate

Not hard enough, then, woman? Must you add
Blame to your husband's suffering? Have you got
No pity for him?

HEDWIG (*turning round on him wide-eyed*)

Have you nothing more
Than tears for the misfortune of your friend?
Where were you when they took him prisoner,
This Tell that you admire so? Did you help him?
You stood and watched. You suffered them to act
Like brutes. They led away your friend. Did Tell
Do the same to you? Did he stand wringing
His hands when you'd the horsemen at your back
And the boiling lake to face? He shed no tears
Of useless pity. He sprang in the boat.
Forgot his wife and children, rescued you . . .

WALTER FÜRST We were so few. We had no arms. We couldn't
Dare attempt to rescue him.

HEDWIG (*throwing herself on his breast*) Oh Father!

You lose him too! The country—all of us—
Need him so much. And he needs us. . . . God save
His soul from desolation. He will find
No friend to cheer him in the dungeon's waste.
If he falls ill . . . his health will be destroyed
In that damp darkness. As the alpine-rose
Pales and perishes in the air of swamps
There is no life for him without the sun
And balsam-bringing air. . . . A prisoner! . . . Tell!
His breath is freedom and he cannot live
In the grave's rankness.

STAUFFACHER

Calm yourself. We all
Shall act together to break down his prison.

HEDWIG

What can you do without him? All the time
That Tell was free, we still had hope. The guiltless
And persecuted had a friend to help them.
Tell saved you all, but all of you together
Can't break his bonds.

[illegible]

STAUFFACHER (*to Walter Fürst*)

Look, how the light has filled his eye. It's not
The dimming-down of nature but the gleam
Of new life itself.

ATTINGHAUSEN

The noble lord

Must leave his ancient hall and take his oath
As citizen among the citizens.
A start is made in Uchtland and in Thurgau,
And noble Bern has raised her head to rule,
Freiburg becomes a fortress of the free
And watchful Zürich wakens all her guilds
To form a war-like army that shall crush
The power of kings beneath her timeless walls.

(*He speaks the following with the tone of a seer, with ever-rising enthusiasm*)

I see the princes and the nobles come
Armoured to wage their wars against this race
Of harmless shepherds. Fighting to the death!
And many a pass made glorious with blood.
My countryman go naked of all armour
A willing sacrifice against the sea
Of lances, which he stems and breaks its power.
The pride of aristocracy shall fall
And freedom's flag shall be unfurled.

(*Taking the hands of Walter Fürst and Stauffacher*)

Hold fast!

Hold fast together always! Let no place
Where freedom dwells be stranger to the rest,
But set high-watch upon the mountain-tops
That brotherhood be joined to brotherhood. . . .
United! . . . Stay united. . . .

(*He falls back on his cushion, but his lifeless hands still clutch Walter Fürst and Stauffacher, who gaze at him for a while in silence until each leaves him, overcome by grief. Meanwhile the servants have entered silently and approached the Baron. Some show their suffering quietly, others more violently. A few kneel beside him and weep on his hand. During this silent action the bell of the castle is tolled.*)

(Rudenz enters)

RUDENZ (*entering hurriedly*)

Is he still alive? Will he hear . . . ?

WALTER FÜRST (*pointing, with head turned away*)

You have become our liege-lord and protector.
And from this hour the castle bears your name.

RUDENZ (*seeing the body and seized with intense grief*)

O merciful God! Did my repentance come
Too late? . . . Could his pulses not prolong
Their beating till he saw my heart reformed?
I scorned his loyalty while he walked in light,
Now he must tread eternal dark. And leaves me
My heavy debt unpaid. . . . Tell me, then,
Did he die in anger with me?

STAUFFACHER

He was told

What you had done. He blessed the bravery
You spoke with.

RUDENZ (*kneeling before the body*)

Holy tenement of flesh
That housed a soul so loved, I vow to you
In this cold hand of death, that I have sundred
All alien ties eternally and turn
Back to my people. I was born a Swiss
And all my soul rejoices in my birth.

(Rises)

Mourn for your friend and father, but do not
Despair. I have inherited far more
Than land: his heart and spirit come to me.
My youth shall pay what his advancing years
Left undischarged to you. Give me your hands,
Noble fathers! Melchtal, I take yours.
Do not draw back and turn away.—Receive
My pledge.

STAUFFACHER

Give him your hand. His heart's returned
And merits trust.

RUDENZ (*to Stauffacher and Walter Fürst*)

Arm yourselves meanwhile. Have all prepared
To wait the signal from the mountain-fires.
For swifter than the swiftest sail can bring
A messenger, our news of victory
Shall come to you. And when the welcome flames
Flare up, then fall like lightning on your foes
And break oppression's wall.

(*Exeunt*)

Scene III

The ravine near Küssnacht.

A way-down between the rocks at the back of the stage. The passers-by are seen on the heights before they enter the main acting area. Rocks close in the scene, one of those nearest the front has a promonotory with bushes growing on it.

TELL (*enters with the cross-bow*)

He must come through this gorge. No other path
Leads to Küssnacht. Now's the time, the place
To consummate my oath, conceal myself
Behind this elder where he's in my range.
'The path's too narrow to allow pursuit.
Then, Gessler, make up your account with God—
The hour has come for you to answer Him.

I lived in peace, harmed no-one, raised my bow
Only against the wild-life of the woods.
No murder stained my thought till you alarmed
The covert of my peace. You turned the milk
Of meditation into serpent's venom.
You taught me how to walk at ease with evil.
The bow-string that was levelled at the head
Of my own son shan't miss a butcher's heart.

My guiltless children, my beloved wife
Must be protected from your spite. My hand
Trembled at the string. Your devilish pleasure

Forced me to take my grisly aim—I struggled
Impotent before you, begging mercy.
And vowed within my soul a fearful oath
That only heaven heard—that I would make
Your heart the goal of my first arrow's flight
When next I took my bow. And what I swore
Secretly, in the hell of torment there,
Becomes a debt to heaven and shall be paid.

You are my lord, you are my Emperor's bailiff.
The Emperor, himself, would not defy
Heaven as you do. He commissioned you
To speak for Justice here. And sternly, too,
To suit his anger. But he did not licence
Unbridled, wanton, murderous lust. The living
God demands such evil be avenged.

So come, you harbinger of bitter pain,
Now my true jewel, the treasure of my heart,
Our target has been obdurate till now
To every holy plea: then it must yield
To you. And trusted bow-string that has served
Me often, and well, in happy hours of hunting,
Do not desert me in the darker cause
Of grim necessity. String that has sent
So many arrows, hold! For should the shaft
Fall powerless, I can send no second after.

(Passers-by cross the stage)

The bench of stone, set here for travellers, gives
A moment's peace, but no abiding rest
Is granted us on earth. Each hurries by
His neighbour with an alien haste, forgets
To ask his suffering. So the merchant comes
Laden with care, the pilgrim goes his way
Simply clad, the monk intent on prayer,
The swarthy thief, the minstrel and the sumpter
With heavy-burdened horse come from afar.
For every highway leads to this world's end.
Each traveller must journey on the way
Of his appointed task. My own—is murder.

In other days, when I set out, the boys
Rejoiced to see me home. I never came
Without some gift—a glistening alpine-flower,
Rare bird, perhaps, or fossilled ammonite
Such as all wanderers through the mountains find.
Today, though, I must seek a different quarry,
Lurk by the way consumed with murderous thoughts
To wipe out infamy. Yet still my thoughts
Arc of my children. Nature, herself, demands
Their innocence be shielded from your violence.
For them alone I stretch my bow to murder.

My cause is just and noble, then. No hunter
Will ever spare himself: he'll tramp for days
Through winter's rigour. He will boldly leap
From rock to rock and scale the slippery walls
That he has limed with blood from his own veins.
He will do that to hunt the smallest chamois.
My quest is God-appointed: he who seeks
My own damnation and my children's death.

(In the distance joyful music is heard that grows louder)

All my life long I've kept my bow to hand,
Am practised in its art, have hit the black,
Brought many prizes home from tournament.
Today I must excel myself to gain
The greatest prize within the mountains' span.

*(A wedding-procession crosses the stage and goes up the ravine.
Tell watches it, leaning on his cross-bow. Stüssi, the rural constable,
comes to join him.)*

STRÜSSI The steward of the Mörlischachen cloister—
Holding his wedding-feast. He's well-to-do.
Owns at least ten herds there on the alps.
Been down to Imisee to fetch the bride.
There'll be some revelry tonight at Küssnacht,
Why don't you come along? We're all invited.

TELL A wedding doesn't want a sombre guest.

STÜSSI Help to cast care aside if you're depressed.
The times are hard, so take life as it comes.

(*Tell rises*)

(Exit)

STÜSSI

If there'd been
 Good Christian souls aboard they'd all have drowned.
 Neither fire nor water touch that scum.

(He looks round)

Now, where's my huntsman disappeared to, then?

(Exit)

(Gessler and Rudolf der Harras on horseback)

GESSLER

Say what you will, I serve the Emperor.
 His pleasure's my concern. He didn't send me
 To flatter peasants or to treat them gently.
 He wants obedience—what's at stake is whether
 The Emperor or the peasant rules this country.

ARMGARD

Now, children! Now's the time!

GESSLER

I didn't put
 The hat up for amusement, or to test
 The people's heart,—I know that well enough—
 I put it there to bend their stiff-necked pride.
 Planted the bogey where they had to pass it,
 See it and recall the sovereignty
 Which they forget.

RUDOLF DER HARRAS

But none the less the people
 Have certain rights.

GESSLER

But this is not the time
 To weigh them up. The world awaits the birth
 Of mammoth change—the Empire widens out.
 The glories which his father planned shall find
 Fulfilment with the present Emperor.
 This tiny nation lies here like a rock
 Impeding us. And somehow we must crush it.

(They make to cross the stage. The woman falls down before the Bailiff)

ARMGARD

Mercy, my lord! Mercy!

GESSLER

Do you dare
 Block my path?

ARMGARD My husband lies in prison.
The children cry for bread. I beg you, Sir . . .
Take pity on our suffering.

[illegible]

ARMGARD He mows the wild
Grasses of the Rigi—on the slopes
Where it's too sheer for even cows to climb.

RUDOLF DER HARRAS (*to Gessler*)
 God, what a wretched pitiful way to live.
 I beg you, Sir, to set him free. Poor man—
 However great his crime, his ugly trade
 Is punishment enough.

(To the woman)

You'll have your rights.
But you must make petition at the fortress.
This is not the place.

ARMGARD I won't be budged—
Not till the Bailiff gives me back my man.
Six moons he's been shut up in that tower
Waiting for sentence.

GESSLER Do you threaten me?
Out of the way, woman!

ARMGARD I want justice.
You're judge. You stand for God and Emperor.
Do your duty. If you hope for justice
From heaven, show it us.

GESSLER Get back! . . . I won't
Stand this rabble in my sight.

ARMGARD (*seizing the bridle of his horse*) I've nothing
More to lose. You don't leave here until
I've got my rights. Yes, you can glare and frown!
Do anything you like! What do we care
About your anger? We're plagued day and night.

ARMGARD (*rising*) He's dead! . . . Murdered! . . . An arrow to the heart!

RUDOLF DER HARRAS (*springing down from his horse*)
God, what horror! . . . Oh, my Lord beg Christ
To show His mercy. Death puts out his hand . . .

GESSLER It was Tell's arrow.

(*He has slid down from his horse into Rudolf der Harras's arms. Rudolf helps him to the bench.*)

TELL (*appearing on top of the rocks*)
Look no further, lord—
You know the bowman. Shepherds have been freed
And innocence made safe. You'll bleed this land
No longer.

(*Disappears from the heights. The people pour in.*)

STÜSSI (*leading them*) What's the matter? What has happened?

ARMGARD The Bailiff has been shot!

PEOPLE (*as they rush in*) . . . Who is it? . . . Shot? . . .

(*As the leaders of the bridal-procession reach centre stage those behind them are still above. The music continues.*)

RUDOLF DER HARRAS
He's bleeding to death. Get help quickly! . . . Don't
Let the murderer get away! . . . My lord! . . .
It's over then. . . . You would not heed my warning.

STÜSSI God, how white he looks. There's no life in him.

MANY VOICES Who did it?

RUDOLF DER HARRAS Have they all gone mad?—This music
Where a man lies murdered? Make them stop!

(*Music suddenly stops. More people follow in.*)

Speak to me if you can, my lord. Have you
Nothing to tell me?

(Gessler makes signs with his hand. Rudolf cannot understand them immediately. Gessler repeats them vehemently.)

Where is it you want me to go?
Is it to Küssnacht? . . . I can't understand you.
O, be patient! Turn your eyes from earth,
Make your peace with heaven.

STÜSSI Those white cheeks!
Death's entered in his heart. His eyes are glassy.

ARMGARD *(lifting up a child)*
Look, children! See how butchers die!

RUDOLF DER HARRAS
Women, have you no feelings? Are you mad?—
To feast your eyes on horror? Help me, there!
Will no-one help me to withdraw the arrow?

WOMEN *(drawing back)*
God slew him. We'll not touch him.

RUDOLF DER HARRAS Curse you all!

(He draws his sword)

STÜSSI *(seizing his arm)*
You'll not dare! Your power here's at an end.
The bully's dead. We'll stand no more barbarians.
We're free men now.

ALL *(tumultuously)* We're free! The country's free!

RUDOLF DER HARRAS
Then has it come to this? Fear and obedience
Gone so soon?

(To the men-at-arms who enter)

You see this nauseous act
Of blood. All help is useless. We waste time
Seeking the murderer. Other cares press on us.
Straight to Küssnacht! We'll defend the fort.
Order's dissolved and duty dead. Allegiance
Forgets her loyalty from this moment on.

(As he goes out with the men-at-arms, six Brothers of Mercy enter)

ARMGARD Make way there! Make way for the Brothers of Mercy.

STÜSSI The ravens coming to the sacrifice!

BROTHERS OF MERCY *(forming a half-circle round the body and singing in low voices)*

Death comes with unrelenting force

Affording no delay to man.

He carries off the living flesh,

When life is full, he cuts its span.

Ready or not, man must atone

His sins at heaven's judgment throne.

(The last lines are repeated as the curtain falls)

Act five

Scene I

An open place near Altdorf.

Backstage right the fortress of Uri with the scaffolding still standing as in the third scene of the first act. On the left a view of many mountains. Signal-fires burning on all of them. It is just day-break. Bells are ringing from many places in the distance.

Ruodi, Kuoni, Werni, Master Stone-mason and many other country people. Also women and children.

RUODI Just look at all those beacons on the mountains!

STONE-MASON The bells ringing out across the wood!

RUODI We've routed 'em.

STONE-MASON The fortresses are taken.

RUODI Yet we, in Uri, still put up with that—
 That tower of tyranny standing on our earth.
 We going to be the last to claim our freedom?

STONE-MASON No, by heaven! We'll break it brick by brick,
 Shatter the yoke they tried to force on us.

ALL Break it! Smash it!

RUODI Where's the trumpeter?

TRUMPETER (*with the horn of Uri*)
 Here! What do you want?

RUODI Climb to the watch.
 Blow until it blares across the mountains,
 Waken every echo in the gorge.
 Call every man in Uri to assemble.

(Exit Trumpeter. Enter Walter Fürst.)

WALTER FÜRST Patience, friends! Patience. We still lack
 News from Schwyz and Unterwalden. Wait!

RUODI What's the point in waiting? Gessler's dead.
 The day of freedom's come.

Crash to the earth, the smoke-hot heaven rent
By her racked cries . . .

WALTER FÜRST

She's safe? . . .

MELCHTAL

It needed all

The quick resolve we'd got! Had Rudenz been
No more than lord to us we might have held
Our lives more dear. But now he shared our oath.
And Berta made the people's cause her own.
We were content to stake our lives, to rush
Through the fire . . .

WALTER FÜRST

You rescued her?

MELCHTAL

We carried her—

Rudenz and I together—from the flames.
The whole framework crashed to earth behind us.
And then—when she had realised she was safe,
She looked to heaven. . . . And Lord Rudenz clasped
me
To his heart. We pledged a brotherhood in silence
That has been tempered in that furnace-heat
And destined to endure all thrusts of fate.

WALTER FÜRST Where's Landenberg?

MELCHTAL

He's gone across the Brünig.

It isn't my fault that the man who robbed
My father of his eyes, still has his own.
He'd fled. I tracked him down. Dragged him before
My father's feet. The sword was poised above him,
But mercy moved the blind old man to grant
The gift of life. He gave his solemn oath
Not to seek vengeance nor return to us.
He'll keep it! He has felt our arm.

WALTER FÜRST

May God

Bless you for keeping victory unstained
By wanton blood.

CHILDREN (*running across the stage with pieces of the scaffolding*)

We're free! We're free! Freedom!

(*A full blast from the horn of Uri*)

WALTER FÜRST The children! They're so happy. When they're old

They won't forget this day.

(Girls bring in the hat on a pole and the whole stage is filled with people)

RUODI

And here's the hat

We had to bow to!

BAUMGARTEN

What's to be done with it?

WALTER FÜRST Dear God . . . and my grandson stood beneath it.

SEVERAL VOICES Get rid of everything that could remind us
Of their oppression. Burn it.

WALTER FÜRST

No! . . . Let's keep it.

The tyrants made it serve their ends! *We'll* make it
A symbol of our freedom.

(The country-people, men, women and children, stand or sit on the beams of the broken scaffolding, grouping themselves picturesquely in a large semi-circle.)

MELCHTAL

What we swore

To achieve on the Rütli is fulfilled.
Brothers in the oath, we stand today
Rejoicing in the ruins of oppression.

WALTER FÜRST Our work is only broached, not finished, friends.

We need courage now and constancy.
Mark my words, the Emperor will venge
His Bailiff's death immediately, use force
To bring back the minion that we've banished!

MELCHTAL Why, let him send his armies. Now we've cleared
The centre of the country, we can deal
With enemies outside it.

RUODI

There aren't many

Passes he can come through. We can block 'em
Easily enough with men.

BAUMGARTEN

We're not afraid

Of any troops he sends. We stand united
Forever.

(Rösselmann and Stauffacher enter)

RÖSSELMANN *(as they come in)* It is judgment from above.

COUNTRY-PEOPLE What's the matter? What is it?

RÖSSELMANN What times we live in!

WALTER FÜRST What's wrong? . . . Herr Werner! Is there news . . . ?

PEOPLE What is it?

RÖSSELMANN You'll be dumbfounded.

STAUFFACHER We have been delivered
From our worst fear . . .

RÖSSELMANN The Emperor is dead—
Brutally murdered!

WALTER FÜRST God have mercy!

ALL What!
Murdered! Did you hear that? The Emperor!

MELCHTAL But that's impossible. Where did you get the news?

STAUFFACHER It's true enough. Assassins fell upon him
At Bruck. Johannes Müller brought the news
From Schaffhausen. You can trust his word.

MELCHTAL But who dared commit a deed so odious?

STAUFFACHER The criminal makes the deed more vile: his
nephew,
His brother's son, Johann, Duke of Swabia!

MELCHTAL Parricide? . . . What provoked him?

STAUFFACHER All the lands
His father left had been withheld from him,
Despite his protests. Having dispossessed him,
They say the Emperor planned to cut him off
With some mere Bishopric. Be that as it may.
The young man lent his ear to violent counsel.
Together with the lords of Eschenbach,
Tegerfeld, Wart and Palm—since he could find

WALTER FÜRST And how did they fulfil
Their grisly oath?

MELCHTAL And so the man
Whose greed was so insatiable has only
Dug himself an early grave.

STAUFFACHER Great terror
Rages like a monster through the land
All the mountain-passes have been closed,
The frontiers fortified. Even Zürich's doors,
That have stood open thirty years, are barred.
They fear the murderers and—still more—revenge!
Armed with a ban of excommunication,
Agnes, dour Queen of Hungary, whose heart

(The country-people embrace one another. Sexton enters with an Imperial Messenger.)

SEXTON These are the Leaders of our land.

RÖSSELMANN AND OTHERS What is it?

SEXTON A message from the Imperial Court.

ALL *(to Walter Fürst)* Well, break
The seal and read it to us.

WALTER FÜRST *(reading)* 'To the moderate
Men of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden:
From the Empress Elsbet, greetings and good wishes.'

SEVERAL VOICES Why does the Empress send to us? Her power
Died with her husband.

WALTER FÜRST *(reading)* 'In the heavy sorrow
Of widowhood, laid on her by her lord's
Most violent death, the Empress still remembers
The love and ancient loyalty of the Swiss.'

MELCHTAL More than she ever did when fortune smiled.

RÖSSELMANN Quiet! Let's listen!

WALTER FÜRST *(reading)*
'She looks to her loyal subjects to make known
Their due abhorrence of the accursed crime.
Accordingly Her Majesty expects
No man in Switzerland to abet these butchers,
But rather to do all within his power
To bring them to the arm of retribution.
She bids her people to recall the grace
And favour which the House of Hapsburg showed
them.'

(Signs of protest from the people)

MANY VOICES Grace and favour!

STAUFFACHER Albrecht's father showed us favour, yes!
But what grace can we boast of from his son?
Did he ratify our ancient freedom
As all his predecessors did? Or set
Store by the proverbial right of those
Whose innocence entitles them to aid

Against oppression? Did he lend his ear
Once to the ambassadors we sent
 In our distress? The Emperor has done
 None of those things. And had our courage failed
 To claim our rights, our suffering would never
 Have touched his heart. What? Give him thanks?
 He sowed no gratitude within these valleys.
 His place was high. He could have been a father
 To us, his people. But it pleased him more
 To keep his favours for the chosen few
 That he'd promoted—let them mourn his death!

WALTER FÜRST We will not glory in his fall. Far be it
 From us to call to mind at such a time
 The evils we have suffered. But it is
 Unfitting and beyond the call of duty
 That we should venge an Emperor who brought
 No good to us—that we should hunt the men
 Who never did us harm. For death dissolves
 Duty's bond. We owe him nothing now.

MELCHTAL And while the Empress weeps, arraigning heaven
 With frenzied pain, that same sky shall receive
 Thanks from a land at last set free of fears.
 Men must sow love, before they merit tears.

STAUFFACHER (*to the people*)
 Where is Tell? The only man not here?
 The founder of our freedom. He did most
 And suffered worst. Come, let us go like pilgrims
 Up to his house to hail him as our saviour.

(*All go out*)

Scene II

The hall of Tell's house.

A fire burns on the hearth. Through the open door we see the countryside. Hedwig, Walter and Wilhelm.

HEDWIG Your father's coming home today. He's free.
 We're all free. Your father saved this country.

WALTER What about me, then, Mother? I was there!
 You ought to say I was. Was I afraid
 To face father's arrow?

HEDWIG (*putting her arms round him*) You've come back.
And it's as though I bore you twice: went through
The agony of motherhood again.
It's over now. And we three are together.
Soon your father will be here to join us.
(*A monk appears at the door of the house*)

WILHELM Mother—a holy brother at the door,
 Asking for alms, I expect.

HEDWIG Well, bring him in, then.
He'll realise there's rejoicing in the house—
Let s get him food and drink.
(Goes out and returns shortly after with a cup)

WILHELM Come in, brother.
Mother's gone to get some food for you.

WALTER Rest and you'll revive your strength.

MONK (*looking round embarrassed and distraught*) Where am I?
What part of the country?

WALTER Don't you know?
Lost your way, then? Why, Sir, you're in Bürgeln—
Canton Uri. At the Schächen valley.

MONK (*to Hedwig who re-enters*)
Are you alone or is your husband here?

HEDWIG I'm waiting for him.—What's the matter, man?
You look as though some evil sent you to us—
Whoever you may be, you need some wine.
(Offers him the cup)

MONK A drought torments my heart but I'll not taste
 A drop until you tell me . . .

HEDWIG Do not touch me!
Stay further off if I'm to listen to you . . .

MONK I swear by this warm fire that welcomes me,
By these dear children's heads that I now hold . . .

(Seizes the boys)

HEDWIG What are you doing? Get back from my children!
You're not a monk! . . . You're not! Those are clothes
Of peace. But there is no peace in your eyes.

MONK I am the most accursed of mankind.

HEDWIG The heart goes out to misery—my soul
Is petrified to look at you.

WALTER (*jumping up*) Here's Father.

(Rushes out)

HEDWIG O, God in heaven!

(Is about to follow but trembles and pulls herself up)

WILHELM (*following Walter*) Father!

WALTER (*outside*) You've come back.

WILHELM (*outside*) Father!

TELL Yes, I'm here. Where's Mother, then?

(They come in)

WALTER There, by the door. She's trembling so
With fear and joy she can't even move.

TELL Hedwig! Mother! God was on our side.
Oppressors shall not part us any more.

HEDWIG (*on his neck*)
Tell . . . O Tell, I've been so anxious for you.

(Monk listens attentively)

TELL Set all those fears aside. Be happy only
You see I'm home again. In my own house.
My feet firmly set on my own earth.

WILHELM Where's your cross-bow, Father? I can't see it.

TELL No, boy, and you never will again,
I've laid it up with honour. I shall not
Use it to hunt again.

HEDWIG (*stepping back and releasing his hand*)
O Tell! Tell!

TELL What's wrong, my dear?

HEDWIG Your hand. . . . The same hand?
O dear God, dare I ever feel that hand. . . .

TELL (*with deep feeling and courage*)
My hand defended you and saved the country:
I can raise it to heaven with impugnity.

(*The monk makes a sudden movement and Tell becomes aware of him*)
Who's this brother?

HEDWIG O God! . . . I meant to tell you.
You speak to him . . . he frightens me.

MONK (*approaching*) Are you
Wilhelm Tell who killed Gessler?

TELL Yes.
And all men may know it.

MONK The hand of God
Has brought me to your house.

TELL (*looking closely at him*) You are no monk.
Who are you, then?

MONK You killed the Bailiff, Gessler,
To avenge the wrong he did you. I have also
Killed my enemy who denied me justice.
He was your enemy as well as mine.
I freed this land from *him* . . .

TELL (*stepping back*) Then, you are . . . No!
Fated horror! . . . Children, go inside.
Hedwig, quickly, take them. God-forsaken
Creature of . . .

HEDWIG Who is he?

TELL

Don't ask, Hedwig!

Make sure the children never hear his name.
Take them outside. A long way off. May God
Forbid you share a house with such a man.

HEDWIG

Quickly, boys . . . come.

(Exit with children)

TELL

I recognise you.

You are the Count of Austria who murdered
The Emperor . . . your uncle and your lord.

JOHANNES PARRICIDA

He plundered my inheritance.

TELL

And is

The man who slew his uncle and his Emperor
Still free to walk the earth and see the sun?

PARRICIDA Listen, before you . . .

TELL

Blood of king and kind

Still dripping from your hands, you dare to enter
My house that I have kept unstained by shame?
You dare to show yourself to me, a man
Who tried to follow God? And beg my shelter?

PARRICIDA I ask you for your help. You, too, have taken
Vengeance on your enemy.

TELL

Do you dare

Confuse the bloody guilt of greed, ambition,
With what the laws of justice led a father
To do in self-defence? Did you protect
Your children? Guard the sacred rights of home?
Ward off the last and worst of all disaster
From those you loved? No. I can raise my hands
To heaven free of guilt, pronounce my curse
On you and what you did. For I avenged
Nature herself. Her holy cause. And you
Defiled her. I share nothing with you. You
Murdered. I defended all I hold
Most dear.

PARRICIDA I dare not
Take open roads or knock on any door.
I walk towards the waste, go wandering
Across the hills a Fury to myself.

I see my face reflected in a stream
And fall back in horror. If you share
My suffering and feel fellow-pity . . .

(Falls down in front of him)

TELL *(turns from him)* No,
Get up.

PARRICIDA Give me your hand, Tell.

TELL Can I help you?
A man of sin help you? . . . Stand up. Though
Your crime is bestial, you are still a man.
And I am still a man. No-one may ask
My help in vain. What I can do, I will.

PARRICIDA *(rising and seizing Tell's hand passionately)*
You save my soul.

TELL Do not grasp my hand.
You must leave here at once—I cannot hide you.
Once you are discovered, do not count
On my protection. Where will you go now?
Where will you look for peace?

PARRICIDA I wish I knew.

TELL My heart suggests you go to Italy:
St. Peter's city. Kneel before the Pope,
Confess your guilt and free your soul.

PARRICIDA He'll only
Hand me to the avengers.

TELL Take his act—
Whatever it may be—as God's own will.

PARRICIDA I dare not join with other travellers,
How can I get to Italy without
Some knowledge of the hidden tracks?

TELL I'll tell you.
Remember this, to climb against the stream
Of the wild Reuss where it rushes from the mountains.

PARRICIDA Must I go near the Reuss again? It ran
Purple with my deed.

PARRICIDA The terrors
Of Nature will not daunt me, once I've tamed
My heart's wild anguish.

PARRICIDA O, Rudolf!
Your grandson comes to tread the earth you ruled.

(The Kuhreihen is heard, blown on several alpine-horns)

Someone's coming. Go!

HEDWIG (*hurrying in*) Where are you, Tell?
Father's coming.—All those from the Rütli—
Coming in procession.

PARRICIDA (*drawing up his hood*) God protect me!
I cannot stay where there's rejoicing.

TELL Hedwig,
Give this man some food and drink. Be generous.
His journey's long. And he will find no room
At any inn. They're coming. Get it quickly.

HEDWIG Who is he?

TELL Do not ask. And when he leaves
 Turn away. Make sure your eyes don't see
 Which way he goes.

(Parricida goes up quickly to Tell, who, however, points with his hand and leaves. When they have both gone out on different sides the scene changes and we have

The Last Scene.

The whole valley in front of Tell's house, as well as the hills which enclose it, is full of country-people who group themselves into a whole. Others file across a high bridge over the Schächen. Walter Fürst with the two boys, Melchtal and Stauffacher come downstage. Others follow them. As Tell comes out of his house, he is greeted with great jubilation.)

ALL Long live Tell! His arrow saved us! He saved Switzerland!

(While those already on stage press round Tell and embrace him, Rudenz and Berta enter. He embraces the country-people, she has her arm round Hedwig. The music from the mountainside accompanies this dumb-show. When it is finished Berta comes into the middle of the people.)

BERTA Men and women! Brothers of the oath!
 Take me to your alliance, as the first
 That Fortune shelters in this land of freedom.
 All privilege that I possess I put
 In your brave hands and ask for your protection
 As common citizen. Will you grant it me?

ALL With all our will and skill.

BERTA So be it, then.
 And I endow this man with all my rights,
 For he and I—like Switzerland—are free.

RUDENZ And freely grant to all upon these heights
 Who stand as vassals here—their liberty.

(As the music quickly starts again the curtain falls)

Classics of Drama in English Translation

General editor—John Prudhoe

Wilhelm Tell was written between 1802 and 1803 and first performed in 1804. It is Schiller's last completed play and belongs to the period of literature and drama which the Germans called 'Weimar Classicism'. It is Schiller's most popular play and lives not only by its annual open-air performances in Switzerland but by many other performances in the conventional theatre. When seen in Switzerland the play inevitably takes on the quality of a national pageant and, in his translation, Mr. Prudhoe has tried to preserve the validity of the play as a national epic, but it is also a play of a different order. If the poet in Schiller is concerned to celebrate ideals, the dramatist still insists on seeing human characters in all their self-contradiction. The ideals, philosophy and the weakness of human nature are displayed together. Like all great works of art, *Wilhelm Tell* is capable of many interpretations, and beneath the theatrical fireworks and the discipline of Weimar classicism lies a deep understanding of the human predicament.

The play is prefaced by an introduction in which the historical background, the language and the character of Tell are discussed. This is a companion translation to Mr. Prudhoe's *Iphigenia in Tauris* by Goethe, of which the reviewer in *German Life and Letters* observed: "The language he uses has the timeless quality and rhythmical flow of real poetry and never sounds "translated". Of all the English versions of this work known to me it is the one that I should recommend to those unable to read the original."

M.U.P.

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Cover photograph from a performance of *Wilhelm Tell* at Interlaken, Switzerland

By courtesy of the Swiss National Tourist Office

KL-109-137

